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We Return to Changsha

When Mao Tse-tung and I got on the boat, it seemed to us that the waters were so high that they reached the sky. The whole landscape was completely transformed, with numerous houses and trees almost inundated or with their tops barely visible above the swirling flood. The boat, as you can imagine, was overcrowded and exceedingly noisy with mothers shouting to their children and the children crying or shouting back.

Since we wanted to write up our diaries, we found ourselves a seat in one corner, but we had barely begun to write when two men started a fight just in front of us. Both of them seemed to be about fifty years of age; one was clean-shaven with glasses, while the other had a moustache and no glasses. Both were well dressed and gave one the impression of being persons of some social position. When they fought, we could not understand what they were saying, but the one with the moustache pulled off the glasses of the other man and threw them onto the deck, then kicked them into the river. The man who had lost his glasses retaliated by tearing his opponent's gown, pulling it with such force that it was torn completely in two. A crowd quickly gathered and Mao and I walked over to see how it would end. We were curious to know what the fight was about, but we could not understand their native dialect, and we did not want to ask any of the other bystanders.

Finally things quieted down. The man with the moustache wrapped his torn gown around himself, picked up his bundle, and looked for somewhere to sit. He came over to the corner where we had left our things, so I took the opportunity to satisfy my curiosity.

"Tell me," I said, "why did that man tear your gown? He was certainly a ruffian!"

"The scoundrel!" he exclaimed angrily. "He was very lucky that he didn't get thrown into the river!"

"But what did he do to you?" I persisted.

"What a rascal he is!" he repeated vehemently. "The fellow came

along looking for a place to sit and I moved over so that he could sit at my right side. He seemed to be quite pleasant and he introduced himself as the secretary of the Magistrate of the Chang Te District. Meanwhile I put two packets of cigarettes which I had bought down beside me on my right side. A few moments later I looked for the cigarettes, but they had disappeared. He had one packet in his hand just ready to take out a cigarette, and the other packet was in his pocket. I could see it quite distinctly because his pocket was not deep. When he had sat down, he had nothing either in his hands nor in his pocket. What is more, the brand I smoke is rather uncommon. There was no doubt at all about it, he had stolen my two packets of cigarettes. When I asked him what happened to my cigarettes, he began to shout at me and then we started to fight. He didn't know that I am an officer in the Yuankiang City police; but anyway it's not very difficult to catch thieves like that!"

"Oh well, it's no good being angry any more," I said, trying to pacify him. "It's all over and done with now."

During this exchange Mao Tse-tung had sat without saying a word, just looking, and showing his surprise when the man said he was a police officer. He gave me a rather cool smile and I said, "Jun-chih, you said that 'one should have sufficient to eat and clothe himself well, and that he should study courteous manners.' Here is an illustration. How do you explain the fight between these two men? A police officer of this one's stature and a yamen secretary are hardly the sort of people who go hungry, and you can see that they are very well-dressed."

Mao sighed but said nothing. I had not realized that the police officer could hear me, but apparently he had caught some words without getting their context.

"Did you say that I was hungry?" he asked. "Yes, that is true. I was in such a hurry to catch the boat that I had no time to eat. I think I'll go now and get myself some lunch. I wonder if you will just keep this seat for me, please. I'll be back very soon."

I laughed to myself as he departed and Mao did not miss this opportunity to pull my leg. "You see," he said, "he had not had anything to eat! That is why he started the fight!"

By this time we were completely surrounded by water. Every-

where one looked there was nothing but an endless sea, and it almost seemed as if we were floating in the sky. From dawn to dusk it was almost impossible to tell where the sky began and the water ended, since the misty horizon merged perfectly into the river. This was an excellent opportunity for us to talk of everything under the sun and we took full advantage of it. We even discussed the dialects of the motley crowd of passengers and the actions of the various individuals. Suddenly someone shouted that the boat was due to arrive in Changsha within half an hour!

I turned to Mao and suggested, "Jun-chih, in half an hour we shall be back in Changsha. Let's have a general summing-up of everything that has happened since we left here. What do you say?"

Mao agreed, saying, "That's a very good idea. First, we know that it is not impossible to overcome all difficulties, since we were able to realize our aim fully and completely. It was not easy to live without a cent in our pockets, but we did manage to do it. Up to now we have begged our way and we have never been in danger of starving to death. We managed to solve quite a few difficulties and overcome many obstacles along the way, too. But there are other points."

"Yes," I agreed, "there are other things. Hunger was the worst experience; it is very painful to have an empty stomach for a long time—one's hands and feet even lose their strength when one is hungry. In this world there are many people who spend most of their lives enduring hunger like that. But there is still more."

Mao added, "We found that almost every member of the community is a *shih li hsiao jen*, a mean-spirited money-worshiper! They think of and recognize only money! We left Changsha without any money in our pockets and as a result we had to accept many harsh words and very unpleasant treatment. Beggars are considered to be low and disgusting people because they have no money!"

"Don't forget that pretty girl," I reminded him. "The one who was so expert at physiognomy and told you your fortune! She was not a money-worshiper!"

"Yes, in all our travels," Mao agreed, "she was the only one who did not worship money."

"But there are still other things," I persisted. "Don't forget that police official and the magistrate's secretary who had enough to eat,

and yet they stole things and then fought over it. That proves that money does not tend to improve morals; only greater knowledge will do that."

"What else?" asked Mao.

"Well, you must not forget the cows without the cowherd, eating their grass so very contentedly and peacefully; but when the cowherd appeared with his whip, only confusion resulted."

"Anything more?" inquired Mao.

"Only that now we can vouch for the truth of that old Chinese saying, 'After begging for three years, the beggar would not accept even a post as mandarin.' And why is that? Because the beggar's life is a life of complete freedom."

Now the other passengers were making such a noise that we could hardly hear ourselves speak. All were very busy arranging their packages and bundles, shouting to each other, so that it was quite impossible to continue our conversation. Soon the boat drew in toward the bank and there was a grand rush for the gangway, everyone trying to squeeze past the others in order to be the first to get off.

Soon we found ourselves again at the West Gate and I stopped and said, "Jun-chih, let's go down and find that ferryman with whom we quarreled. Let's see if he's down there yet."

"But why should we go and look for him?" asked Mao.

"Now we have money and we could pay him what we owe him," I said.

"I don't agree!" answered Mao.

"You don't? Why not?" I wanted to know.

"Because we did suggest to him that we would pay him on our return, but he refused to accept our offer. Now we have no obligation to pay him because we promised him nothing," he answered.

"But I feel sorry for him," I continued. "Now that we have some money, why not give him some? After all, we did take his boat without paying the regular fare!"

"But that is all past and finished now," Mao insisted. "There's no need to drag that matter up again." So saying, he turned and set off, walking in front of me for the first time since we had set out. He seemed so determined that I decided to let him have his own way and I followed him into the city.

Just inside the gate we had a picture taken, with our umbrellas on our right shoulders and the bundles hanging close to our backs, exactly as we had carried them on our travels. I remember that Mao stood at my left. We really made an interesting picture with our short-cropped hair, shorts, and straw shoes, all much the worse for wear. This photograph was left in the house where I was born in Hunan. No doubt the Communists failed to recognize their leader when the house was confiscated several years ago and I suppose it was burned as one of those "capitalist things."

After we had the photograph taken, we returned to the Ch'u Yi School where we both had a bath, ate a meal, and then sat down to open our bundles. We finished writing our diaries and then proceeded to count our money. We had two dollars and forty cents left, which we divided equally between us as beggars' property. Then I said to Mao, "I'm going back home now. My father and mother will be expecting me. What will you do?"

"I also shall go back home," he replied. "They were making two pairs of shoes for me and they will be waiting for me."

