GLORY'S BY THE BLOSSOM BRIDGE

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GLORY'S BY THE BLOSSOM BRIDGE
by
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Talk about our Glory's by the Blossom Bridge — now with a name that's on everybody's lips, there was a shop / to beat the band with. Of course I'm talking about the rice-noodle shop Grandpa opened at the head of the Blossom Bridge. You know that bridge, the one just outside the River East Gate back in Kweilin. Now I ask you, was there anybody in all of Kweilin City who didn't know about Grandpa Heavenly Glory's noodles? Who hadn't heard of them, I ask you? Grandpa made his start in life selling horsemeat and rice-noodles.

He sold them at two coppers a dish, and he was always sure to sell at least a hundred orders a day. If you got there a little late you wouldn't get a bite, because they'd all sold out.

I can still remember Grandma with her red woollen strings threading those little copper coins, one string after another, laughing so much she simply couldn't keep her mouth closed. She used to point at me and say, "Sissy, when the time comes, you shore won't have to worry about your dowry." Even when they had parties in the grandest homes,

*The name Tien-jung means, literally, "Heaven-Glory".*
in the city, they'd send out for our noodles. I used to go
with Grandma to make the deliveries. When all those
swank ladies in the big fancy houses saw how cute I was
and how I always said right thing to say, they'd stuff handfuls of tips in my pockets
and call me "Rice-noodle maid."

But the Glory's by the Blossom Bridge I run now
hasn't got even a bit of the old glamour. I never
would have dreamed I'd end up opening a restaurant after
fleeing to Taipei. My husband wasn't even a businessman
in the first place; he was in the military back in Mainland
China. As a matter of fact, I was in a few years myself.
As a Battalion Commander's wife. Who would have expected
that Battle of Northern Kiangsu to come along and sweep
my husband away to God knows where. In the panic that followed,
we military dependants were evacuated to Taiwan. The first
few years, I asked around for news of my husband wherever
I went. But later on when he appeared time after time
in my dreams, and always covered with blood, I knew he must have gone first. Here I was, a lone woman stranded in Taipei. Had to find some way to make a living. I scraped together a few dollars here and a few bucks there and finally had enough to open this little restaurant here on Evergreen Road. Before I really knew what hit me, I'd already been a "Boss Lady" for over ten years; why, I can tell you the name of every last person who lives along this section of Evergreen Road, even with my eyes closed.

Mostly, the people who eat at my place are government workers living from hand to mouth— you know, City clerks, elementary-school teachers, district staff workers, what have you— every last one of them with a wallet as flat as a dried-out bedbug. They order a little bit of this never anything fancy, (plain) run-of-the-mill home-cooking and a little bit of that, but it's no big deal, just everyday home-cooking. You have to work harder than an old ox turning a millstone to squeeze any extra fat out of a bunch like that.

But I've got to say, poor old friends of mine, and yet it's been these poorer customers who've supported me all these years; without them, my restaurant would have folded a long time ago.
Quite a few of the customers are from Kwangsi, my home province; it's the taste of real down-home cooking keeps them coming back to our place year after year. I've got a group of them on monthly meal tickets, and every last one of that crew is a good old Kwangsi boy. Whenever we get down to chewing the fat, seems like it always turns out we're kinfolk, one way or another.

These old live-alones, some of them have taken their meals at a stretch; at my place three to five years; a few of them made it for as long as seven or eight years and swallowed their last mouthful right here. Just like old man Li, he was big in the lumber business way back when in Liuchou; everybody called him "Half-the-Town Li," talk was he owned half the houses in town. His son runs a general store down in Taichung; he took and dumped the old fellow in Taipei, left him all by himself; sent him a check every six months. He ate at my place for eight long years; must have broken two dozen of my rice bowls. Had the palsy, and his hands would shake any time he picked a bowl up. The old bird loved to sing the opera Revenge of the Heavenly Thunderbolt. The minute he started singing,
down fell a running nose and two streams of tears. And then
one night he ordered a whole big spread, just for himself;
cleaned it all up, said it was a grand occasion, his seventieth
birthday. Who would have guessed he'd hang himself the next
day! We all ran over to see. There he was, all right, the
old fellow, hanging from a big old withered tree, his frayed
cotton shoes fallen to the ground and his black felt hat
rolled away off to one side. As for the food money he still
owed me, I tried asking his son for it, but all I got out of
that gallows-bird was mean backtalk, a good dressing down,

We people in the restaurant business can't afford to
carry a bunch of free-loaders on the tab. After all, we're
in it for the business; we're not running poorhouses.

It's just my hard luck, all right, that I should have let
Crazy Ch'in eat at my place over half a year without paying
a single cent. He'd been doing just fine at his job for the
city, and then he had to go and try to get fresh with a
female employee and got himself the sack; that's when he
went crazy — woman-crazy if you ask me. He said he
used to be a magistrate in Jung County back in Kwangsi; he was a little too free.

Even had two concubines! And then one day his hands began sneaking up on one of the lady customers in my restaurant, and I had to give him the old heave-ho too. He marched along out on the street, head cocked to one side, eyes all askew, Stuck his right arm up in the air and began snatching and grabbing like wild. White foam bubbled out of his mouth, he roared, "Clear the road! Clear the road! His Honor the County Magistrate is coming!" Another time he went to the market and felt up a vegetable hawker's ninnies.

She grabbed her basket pole and hit him one right on the head, the spot opened up just like a flower. Last August when we had that big typhoon, this area around Evergreen Road was completely flooded. Even the tables and chairs in my place floated away. When the water finally went down, heaps of dead chickens and cats came popping out of the ditch along Evergreen Road. Some were so cruddy they were covered with maggots, and when the sun started beating down on them the whole street stank to high heaven. When
the Board of Health came by to decontaminate the area, they drained the ditch and fished up Crazy Chin. He was all wrapped in a coat of mud and stiff as a board. Looked like a big tortoise on its back with all four legs stuck up in the air. Nobody knew when he had fallen in.

To tell the truth — and I'm not just saying this to stick up for us folks from Kweilin — a place like our Kweilin, with its heavenly scenery, you just have to expect the people to be a bit extraordinary, too. Not like you people from those little holes like Junghsien and Wuning, those bucktoothed clodhoppers every last one of them with their jaw-breaking native jargon — most of them have got why, all they can do is talk you a mouthful of gobbledygook:

if you ask me, they've all got a wild Miao tribesman in their family tree somewhere. Now I ask you, how ever could the likes of them compare with us Kweilin folk? Man by man, woman by woman, who among us hasn't got a touch of the divine beauty of those mountains and waters? I used to tell that crew of bachelors, Don't sell this lil' ole fairy godmother short. In my heyday back in Kweilin I was the belle of River East Gate, When I worked for Grandpa, the soldiers

* gobbledegook is identified with Kremmler's in Washington — an elegant very American. Would be out of place here.
from Headquarters would gather round the door of our noodle shop like flies after blood; you just couldn't keep them away.

That's how my husband got together with me. Green hills everywhere, no wonder, back home, your eyes'll get brighter just looking at them; blue waters, you wash in them and your complexion turns smooth and fair. Back then I never dreamed I'd ever live in a dump like Taipei — a typhoon this year, an earthquake next year. Doesn't matter what kind of great beauty you are, take it from me, this weather is enough to ruin anybody's looks.

Of all my customers, Mr. Lu was the only one from Kweilin, like me. You didn't even have to ask, you knew it the minute you saw him. He was polite, thoughtful, a fine gentleman; educated, taught Chinese at the Evergreen Elementary School for years.

As I remember, he must have been thirty-five or so when he first started eating at my place. He had such refined manners, refined as you please in every way. Quiet, unassuming, he'd just sit down, bend over his bowl and tend to his eating. But whenever I'd go over to his table to serve him something or give him another
Helping of rice, he'd always get up a bit from his stool and say to me with a gentle smile, "Thank you very much, Boss Lady." Thank me with a "Boss Lady, you're really too kind."

A thin fellow, pretty tall, too, a little stooped.

Had a pale face and a nose straight as a scallion. Looked old for his age, a bit rundown. His hair had all gone gray early and whenever he smiled there'd be a whole bunch of deep crow's-feet at the corners of his eyes, but down underneath it all you could still see the outlines of what must have been a handsome face at one time. I often bumped into him on the street. He'd always have a long string of elementary-school kids hopping and skipping along behind him. Whenever they crossed the street, he'd stand in the middle of the intersection, spread out his arms to stop the traffic, and shout, "Careful! Careful!" until the little ones were all safely on the other side.

I don't know why, but whenever I saw the patient way he did that, it always made me think of a gentle rooster I used to have. Why, that rooster would actually mother those chicks. Many a time I saw him spread his wings way out and shelter a whole flock of them underneath.
It was only after I started chewing the rag with him that I discovered his grandfather was none other than the Old Gentleman Lu Hsingch'ang himself. The Old Gentleman had once been a big official in Hunan Province, an Inspector General at that. Around Kweilin he was a well-known philanthropist. He was the one who set up the Foster Virtue Middle School just outside the River East Gate. Old Missus Lu used to be wild about our Glory's rice noodles in thick soup, I even used to go over to the Lu residence with Grandma to deliver them.

"Mr. Lu," I said to him, "I used to go over to your home way back when. That was some grand mansion you had there!"

He smiled a bit; after a while he answered, "When we retreated from the Mainland our own troops put the torch to it. Burned it all down to the ground."

"What a waste," I sighed. I could still remember that garden of theirs, all red and white with peonies.

Now I ask you, can anybody blame me for playing favorites
with a man like Mr. Lu? Just think what a good family
he came from, and fallen on evil times, too, just like
all of us here. You could tell he had real class. Always
was a man of real culture. He was one of those who would
mind his own business and never said anything that didn’t
cause the least trouble. He wasn’t at all like some of those who came in here
from Kwangsi barbarians. I could name—smashing bowls and
breaking chopsticks, yelling and hollering, always bitching
about something or other. Sometimes they’d complain
that there was sand in their rice, and sometimes they’d complain
about flies in their food. I couldn’t help getting burned up.
In times like these we’re lucky just to be alive. But
instead of making the best of things they had the gall
to be picky about the food. I didn’t care whether they got
green-eyed with envy or not, I always put something extra in
Mr. Lu’s food—beef, the Shank cut; pork, all lean.
At least once a week I’d go into the kitchen and make him a
piping-hot bowl of noodles with my own hands: braised beef-
liver, hundred-leaf tripe, sprinkle it with parsley and
esesame oil, and then top the whole thing off with a handful
of deep-fried peanuts. I’d serve it to him steaming hot.
I'll bet you couldn't find another restaurant in all of Taipei where you could get a meal like that: don't talk to me about Yunnan Kuoch'iao noodles! Well, really, I gave Mr. Lu that dish as a special treat. Of course a good part of the reason I was trying so hard to get in good with him was on account of Hsiu-hua.

Hsiu-hua was my husband's niece. Her husband was a soldier too, a platoon-leader. He disappeared back on the Mainland the same way my husband did. She hadn't given up hope right away either. She waited and waited; got a job weaving in a company that made hemp sacks. Worked so hard her hands were calloused, but when you came right down to it, she was one of our Kweilin girls, after all.

neat, fresh-faced, very decent-looking. Well, I got hold of her and tried to get her to snap out of it.

"Hsiu-hua, honey," I said, "you and Ah Wei really loved each other. I can understand your wanting to wait for him for the rest of your life; that's a beautiful thing. But take a look at me, your aunt. I'm a good lesson had to you. Do you think your uncle and I didn't have feelings..."
for each other, too? Yes, I waited. Waited until I am
what you see today. I'm not complaining, but if I'd known
I was going to end up like this, I'd have done things a
good deal differently ten or so years ago. Let's suppose
your Ah Wei is alive. You still can't be sure you'll ever
see him again. And what if he's already gone? Then, honey,
I'm afraid all your suffering will have been for nothing."

In the end, Hsiu-hua got talked into it; she covered
her face and broke down and cried. If it were anyone else
I'd have thought about it a bit before butting in. But
Hsiu-hua and Mr. Lu were both Kweilin folks. If I could
get them together, it would just have to be a good marriage.

As for Mr. Lu, I even found out how he was situated in
a financial way. You see, Mrs. Ku, his landlady, was a mah-jong cronie of mine.
That old Hupei bag had a knife for a mouth; when she
started jawing about anyone he'd be lucky to escape with
his life, and yet she always stuck up for Mr. Lu. Said she'd
never seen such a well-behaved man in all her life. Didn't
eat much, didn't spend much, and, except for playing his
tartar violin and singing a little opera, he didn't have
any vices at all. You could always find half a dozen or so elementary-school kids at his place at night. He raised chickens with the money he took in for tutoring them.

"Those chickens! Why, they're Mr. Lu's great-grandpa and great-grandma, that's what they are," said Mrs. Ku, laughing. "You've never seen anything like it — the way he waits on those chickens! Such patience!"

Every New Year's Mr. Lu would bring two big bamboo casefuls of his black-and-whites to sell in the marketplace. Every last one of them had a bright comb and shiny white feathers. They must have weighed a good seven or eight pounds each. I even bought two of them myself once; cut a big bowl of chicken fat just off the rumps alone. The way Mrs. Ku had it added up, including all the compound interest he got on his betting-pool money over the last few years, Mr. Lu had at least forty or fifty thousand Taiwan dollars; he could easily afford to get himself a wife.

And so, one New Year's Eve I got Mr. Lu and Hsiu-hua to come on over. I cooked a whole table full of Kweilin dishes and heated up a steaming pot of Shaohsing wine.
I tried every which way I could, with just a little bit of a tug here and just a little bit of a push there, to get something going between them. Hsiu-hua did seem a bit interested and kept a coy smile on her face, but Mr. Lu, a big, grown man like that, started acting shy. When I egged him on to drink a toast with Hsiu-hua, he actually started to blush.

I collared him on the street the next day and asked him, "Well, Mr. Lu, what do you think of our Hsiu-hua?" He was so flustered he couldn't say a thing. I gave him the eye and smiled.

"Our Hsiu-hua's been saying nice things about you." "Please don't pull my leg," he stammered.

"Who's pulling your leg?" I cut right in, "You'd better give me a treat right away, and I'll be your go-between. Why, I can taste the wine at your wedding feast already!"

"Boss Lady." All of a sudden Mr. Lu pulled a long face, "No more of this kidding around, please. I got engaged back on the Mainland a long time ago."

He gave me the back of his head and walked off. I got so mad I shook all over, couldn't say a word for hours.
Well! Find me another miserable man like that under the sun!

So he thought he was still going to eat my hot noodle soup, huh!

Who wasn't paying me three hundred and fifty a month? From now on, just like everybody else—fat pork! After that, he tried to strike up a conversation with me several times.

I gave him the cold shoulder. Not until Hsiu-hua married a businessman, a solid one, at that, did I let some of the anger in my heart blow away. Well, after all, he was one of us Kweilin folks. But if he'd been from any other place . . . !

One mid-September, there was a day when the heat came in like a tiger and I was at the restaurant all day long, dripping with sweat. By five or six in the afternoon I simply couldn't take it any longer; I turned things over to my cook, grabbed my rushleaf fan and went down to that little park at the end of the street to get some fresh air and take a breather. There are some stone benches under the big elm tree where you can cool off. I caught sight of Mr. Lu in a T-shirt and a pair of wooden clogs, sitting there by himself. His head was bowed; he was completely wrapped up in his Tartar violin. The minute I heard it, why!
he was playing one of our Kweilin operas! It made me tingle all over. Back in the old days in Kweilin I used to be a great opera fan; whenever Little Gold Phoenix, Star-from-his-Old-Prodigy sang, I'd go every day. I went right up to him and said, "My, Mr. Lu, you know Kweilin opera, too!"

He stood up in a hurry and greeted me. "Oh, not really, I just play and sing to myself for the fun of it."

I sat down next to him and sighed. "Wouldn't it be wonderful if only I could hear Little Gold Phoenix sing an opera again someday."

"She used to be my most favorite singer, too, said Mr. Lu. "Oh yes! When she sang 'Homecoming to the Cave' it was enough to tear your heart out!"

I had to coax him quite a while before I got him to tune up his violin and sing a passage from "Hsteh P'ing-kuei's Homecoming to the Cave." I had never dreamed Mr. Lu could sing a female role, but his voice was rich and clear. In fact,
It rather reminded me of *Little Gold Phoenix*. "Eighteen long years have taken their toll on Lady Precious Bracelet" — it pierced my heart when I heard that.

Mr. Lu stopped playing. "You see? That child Precious Bracelet waited eighteen long years, she waited for Hsueh-P'ing-kuei and got him back after all — — I let out a sigh. He just smiled and didn't say anything.

"Mr. Lu," I asked him, "What family is your fiancée?"

"She's one of the Los. Lo Chin-shan is her father."

"Oh, she's one of the Lo girls." I told Mr. Lu all about how I often used to go to the Lo store, Woven Jade Pavilion to buy silks and satins. Back then in Kweilin their family was making money hand over fist. He listened to me in silence. After a long time he started to talk, thoughtfully and in a low voice.

"She and I grew up together, from the time we were little. We were schoolmates at Foster Virtue." He smiled and clusters of wrinkles appeared at the corners of his eyes. As he spoke, he lowered his head, picked up his bow and started to play whatever came to mind. The sun began to set and darkened
to a dull red. A breeze blew up. It was warm against the body and blew hard enough to send shivers all through Mr. Lu's gray hair. I leaned back against the stone bench and closed my eyes, listening to the plaintive note of his bow as it went rubbed gently and somewhat mournfully back and forth across the strings. My eyes grew heavy and I dozed off. One moment I saw Little Gold Phoenix and Star-from-his-Seventh-Year on stage in "Homecoming," the next moment K'ech P'ing-kuei turned into my husband and came galloping toward me on his horse.

"Boss Lady — " I opened my eyes and saw that Mr. Lu had put away his violin and was getting ready to leave. The sky was already filled with stars.

" There was a time when Mr. Lu suddenly seemed on top of the world. A rosy glow spread all over his sallow face. Mrs. Ku told me he was actually fixing up his room; he'd even bought a brand new quilt with red silk cover."

One day in my place I noticed him sitting alone grinning to himself.
"Happy news, Mr. Lu?" He blushed right away. Then he hunted around in his pockets until he finally fished out an envelope, yellowed, of coarse paper, but carefully folded.

"It's her letter..." he said softly, swallowing hard. He was so choked up he could hardly speak. He told me a cousin of his in Hong Kong had finally managed to get in touch with his fiancée. She'd already made it to Canton.

"It will take ten bars. Comes to exactly fifty-five thousand Taiwan dollars. If this had happened a little while back, I'd never have been able to scrape that much together, but..." He blurted out his good news by fits and starts, and it wasn't until he'd gone on for some time that I figured out he was paying some big operator in Hong Kong to smuggle his fiancée off the Mainland. The going rate was ten gold bars a head. The way he clutched that letter in both hands while he was talking, you'd think it was his own life he was holding on to.

Mr. Lu waited for a month. The waiting made him so fidgety, looking at him I could tell that though his body was still here, his soul had flown off somewhere else.
One day he came in, took a mouthful, got up again and walked right out. I noticed his face, dead, ashen; his eyes were red. I ran out and stopped him on the street.

"What's wrong, Mr. Lu?"

He stopped; his mouth kept opening as though he was about to say something, but he couldn't get it out. And then all at once he sobbed.

"He's not even human!" He went on talking, and the more he said the faster he went, starting pointing and waving the arms, and came out with a whole bunch of stuff, what he said was so garbled you'd have thought he was talking with a mouthful of marbles, but I did manage to make out that he'd sent the money to a cousin of his in Hong Kong; the cousin guy pocketed cash simply sat on the money and when Mr. Lu got someone in Hong Kong to look him up the cousin just pretended he didn't know a thing about it.

After he'd caught his breath, he mumbled with a bitter laugh, "I'd been saving that money for fifteen years — "

He nodded his head up and down, up and down; his gray hair sticking out in ever which way. Somehow or other all of a sudden I was reminded of those black-and-whites he used to raise.
Every New Year's he'd be standing in the market holding a rooster with a bright red comb and black and white speckles all over its body. How fat he used to get every single one of those birds.

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For half a year or so he lost all interest in food and drink. He was a quiet man to begin with, but now he wouldn't get so much as a word out of him. When I saw his face get so thin and drawn it was no bigger than the palm of my hand, I went back to my old habit of feasting him on my best piping hot noodles. I never imagined he'd ever lose his appetite for those noodles of mine, but he did; time after time he'd leave half his bowl untouched. Once he didn't show up for two weeks in a row, and I thought he'd took sick. I'd just about made up my mind to go pay him a visit when I ran into his landlady Mrs. Ku in the marketplace. As soon as that old Hupei bag set eyes on me she grabbed me by the shoulder, walking beside me, cackling as she went, swearing and spitting.
"My dear Mrs. Ku, now what's the great news this time?"

My shoulder still hurt where she'd grabbed it. The old snoop, if any married woman in the neighborhood stole a man, she'd sounded as though she was keeping watch under their bed.

"What can I say?" She spat hard again. "To think even a man like Mr. Lu would start messing around like that. You'll never guess who he's shackled up with — Spring Fire! That washerwoman."

"My God!" "My stars!" "Mamma mia!" I couldn't help letting out a yell.

That shemale had a pair of boobs on her would be bouncing off your face before she was close enough for you to make out who it was behind them, she still wasn't much over twenty and already that rump of hers was puffed out like a drum all tightened up and ready to get banged.

When she was scrubbing clothes, there wasn't a single part on her body that didn't jiggle; Those big melons of hers would get going like a pair of mallet-heads, one up, one down; whenever she clapped eyes on a man, she'd give him the old come-on smile and bedroom eyes. The thing I remember most
about her is that day in the marketplace when a young vegetable hawker did something or other to rub her the wrong way.

Before you knew it, those giant knockers of hers were already rammed into that poor man, all he could do was stumble backwards step after step, on the spot she sprayed a volley of spit all over him and exploded "Fuck you mother's pussy!"

What a spitfire! What a tramp!

"Whenever Spring Fire delivered Mr. Lu his laundry in no time flat she'd be worming her way into his room," Mrs. Ku continued.

I knew right off that Taiwanese trollop was up to no good.

And then one afternoon, when I was passing by Mr. Lu's window I heard all kinds of groaning and crying. I thought he'd had some kind of accident, so I stood on tip toe and peek inside through the gap between his curtains. Pew!"

Mrs. Ku spat on the ground as hard as she could. "There they were, the pair of them, stark naked in broad daylight! That damn piece was riding on top of Mr. Lu, her hair was flying all over the place, she looked just like a lioness.

To run into a thing like this, now you tell me, Boss Lady, isn't that just my luck?"
"Well! No wonder you've been hitting Thirteen Odds at mah-jong all the time these days, you tripped over such a rarity!" I couldn't help laughing; that old nine-headed Hupei bird, all she did was pry into other people's little secrets.

"Aw, you're full of bull!"

"Well," I sighed, "I guess Mr. Lu's got a good deal going there. From now on at least he won't have to worry about finding somebody to do his laundry."

"But that's just the funny part about it!" Mrs. Ku clapped her hands. "Her wait on him? Never happens. It's Mr. Lu who treats her like a living treasure. Miss High-and-mighty doesn't even wash clothes any more. Just sits around all day long, fingernails all painted bright red, and listens to Taiwanese opera on the radio. And you'd think Mr. Lu was some old horse or ox, the way he works himself. He's bought a stove so he can cook for her every day. But the thing that really ticks me off is that now Mr. Lu even washes his own sheets. You can imagine how clean he gets them! When I see them drying out there

A deprecatory saying about natives of Hupei Province goes--"In the sky the nine-headed geese, on earth the Hupei-ese". Hence, Hupei people are sometimes nicknamed chiu-t'ou niao (nine-headed birds).
in the courtyard it's enough to make me throw up all spotted with red and yellow like that.

The next day I ran into Mr. Lu and Spring Fire on the street. They were coming right at me, Spring Fire leading the way. She had her head stuck way up in the air, that big bust of hers sticking out. She was wearing real loud flashy clothes, had a big splash of bright red rouge on each cheek, and sure enough, she had her nails painted. Even her toenails were all covered with Cutex remnants flying. She went strutting down the street in full sail, her wooden clogs clippety-clop, slamming through the air. Mr. Lu followed along behind her carrying a shopping basket. When he got close to me I did a double-take. At first I thought he was wearing a black hat, but now I saw he'd dyed his hair jet black; hadn't done a good job either; it was coarse and stuck out from his head like wires. His face was so chalky white he must have had cold cream on; the eyes were sunk way in, and the sockets were so dark his face was nothing but two black caves in a spooky background of white. I don't know why, but suddenly I started thinking of the days when I used to go
to the opera back in Kweilin. There was an old singer—
there named White Jade Court. He was well on the other
side of fifty, but he kept on singing young romantic leads.

Once I saw him in "Pao Yu Wails by Black Jade’s Coffin."

I was sitting in the front row. He’d absolutely caked himself
in white powder for the role, but when he sang, the wailing
part every wrinkle on his aged face showed through; when
he opened his mouth to sing, all you saw was a mouthful of
black tobacco-stained teeth. Just watching him made me
feel sick at heart; imagine the part of Pao Yu being played
like that! When Mr. Lu brushed past me, he turned his head
and pretended not to know me; I just walked
behind away bringing up the butt end of that Taiwanese
Changchun Road

All up and down Evergreen Road everybody knew about
that business between Mr. Lu and Spring Fire. I’m talking
about that incident, when Mr. Lu got beaten up and wounded
by Spring Fire. She was bailing a man in Mr. Lu’s room;
—from that young stud down the street, you know, Little Horse.

Note: Get badly hurt.
the shoeshine boy. Mr. Lu ran home so's to catch them in
the act. Little Horse flattened Mr. Lu with a single kick
and took off. Mr. Lu struggled to his feet and boxed
Spring Fire's face a couple of times.
"And that's how he set off the whole disaster," Mrs. Ku
told me that day. "Would you think there could even be such
a cruel and vicious female in this old world? Did you ever
see such a thing in your life? She lit into Mr. Lu like a
hurricane, managed to straddle him as if she was riding
a horse, tore and clawed at every part of him she could.
And then with one bite and half his ear was off! If it
hadn't been for me, I ran out into the street and started
screaming for help, that bitch would have finished Mr. Lu off
right then and there!"

Mrs. Ku went on complaining about what bad luck it was
to have such an ugly thing happen at her place. She said
if she'd had her way she'd have thrown Mr. Lu out right then
and there, but he'd taken such a beating, he just lay
there on his bed, couldn't even move. When his wound healed,
he started boarding at my restaurant again. There was nothing left of him but a bag of bones. He still had some bruises on his neck, and the lower half of his left earlobe was gone; there was a piece of white adhesive on the wound. He'd stopped dying his hair, but he hadn't washed the old dye out; the new hair growing out at his temples was white as could be, but the hair on top of his head was still jet black. Looked as though he was wearing some sort of black pot-cover; you wouldn't believe how funny it looked. As soon as he came in, all those old Kwangsi duffers who board at my place winked at each other and smiled.

One day when I was standing at that bus stop over there by the Evergreen Elementary School, I happened to see Mr. Lu. He was leading a group of kids who'd just gotten out of school; they were all jabbering and horsing around when Mr. Lu suddenly turned and shouted at them, "Stop. "No fooling around!"

You could tell he was mad as a hornets' nest; his face turned absolutely purple, his neck all red and the
veins in his forehead seemed about ready to burst. The kids


got really scared and settled down right away, all except

one little girl who broke out giggling. Mr. Lu bounded

over to her, stuck a finger in her face and barked,

"How you

You dare to laugh? You dare to laugh at me?"

That made the little moppet shake her pigtails

back and forth and laugh even harder. Mr. Lu slapped her face

so hard she lost her footing and ended up sitting on the

ground. She opened her mouth as wide as she could and

started bawling (for all she was worth). Mr. Lu hopped

up and down screeching at the top of his voice. He pointed

down at her.

"You little devil, you got the gall to push me around,

too? I'll beat you, I'll beat the shit out of you!"

While he was yelling, he reached out to grab her

by the pigtails. The other kids were so scared they

started crying and yelling for help. People

on the street began to crowd around, some of them trying

to comfort the kids; then two men, teachers from Evergreen

Elementary grabbed him and hauled him off.
wildly as he went, Mr. Lu was foaming at the mouth and yelling,

"I'll kill her! I'll kill her!"

That was the last time I saw him. He died the next day.

When Mrs. Ku went into his room she found him slumped over his desk. At first she thought he'd fallen asleep; his head was resting on the desk; his fingers were still gripping his writing brush, a stack of composition books piled up next to his head. Mrs. Ku said the coroner had examined his body for hours without being able to find anything wrong. Finally he filled in the Cause of Death: "Heart failure."

"Heart failure."

Mrs. Ku warned me not to let it out to anyone who might come around looking for a room that Mr. Lu had died at her place. She paid some Buddhist and Taoist monks to come over and chant so's to help Mr. Lu's soul along on its journey to the next world. I even bought some candles and paper money myself; burned the money right outside the front door to my place. After all, when you added it all up, Mr. Lu must have taken his meals at my restaurant for
five or six years. For that matter, when Mr. Li and Crazy Ch'in died I'd burned quite a bit of spirit money for them to use in the next world, too.

I got out Mr. Lu's bill and added it up; he still owed me two hundred and fifty dollars. First I went to the police station to get a permit, then I went over to Mrs. Ku's to get some of Mr. Lu's things to sell so I could get my money back. After all, a woman like myself in a small business just doesn't have any spare cash to throw around. Mrs. Ku greeted me with a broad smile, probably thought I'd come to get her for a mah-jong game. When she found out what I'd really come for, she gave me a funny laugh. She said:

"Think there's anything left for you? Where'd you expect I was going to get his back rent from?"

She shoved his room key into my hand and stomped back off to her kitchen. I went to his room; sure enough, it was empty. There were a few old books stacked on his desk and a raggedy old writing-brush still stood in its holder.
That old Hupei bag must have taken everything that was worth anything and stashed it away somewhere. I opened the closet and found a couple of white shirts hanging inside, their collars all frayed; in one corner of the closet there were a few pairs of worn-out yellowed panties. When I gave the room another once-over, I noticed that Tartar violin of his hanging on the wall, all covered with dust. There were a few photographs hanging next to it. What was this? Wasn't that bridge in the biggest photograph in the middle Blossom Bridge? Our own Blossom Bridge, just outside the River East Gate, back in Kweilin? I grabbed a chair and climbed up in a hurry and took the picture down, carried it over to the window and wiped the glass frame as clean as I could with the corner of my jacket, held it to the light, squinted up my eyes and took a good, careful look. Oh yes, there it was, our Blossom Bridge. Yes, there was the River Li flowing underneath, there were the two stone pillars with the dragons carved on them at the head of the bridge. Two youngsters were standing next to the pillars, a boy and a girl.
The boy was Mr. Lu, the girl had to be that Miss Lo he was engaged to. Mr. Lu was in student's uniform and duck-billed cap. How handsome and clean-cut he looked. I took another look at that Lo girl and couldn't help a silent "Bravo!"

Now there was a Kweilin girl for you! Her whole body had the grace of the flowing waters of the river, and her eyes, bright and innocent, had the classic upward tilt. Just to look at her was enough to melt your heart. The two of them were standing close together, shoulders touching, leaning on each other, smiling happily, couldn't have been more than eighteen or so at the time.

No matter how hard I tried I couldn't scare up a thing worth any money in Mr. Lu's room, so I took the photograph. I planned to hang it in my restaurant. Someday if anybody from Kwangsi comes along I'll point to it and tell them that's the Glory Noodle Shop by the Blossom Bridge my grandpa used to run back in Kweilin was right there, at the entrance of the road, by the head of the bridge, on the bank of the River Li.
BIO-BIBLIOGRAPHY FOLLOW-UP SHEET
July 1, 1978 - June 30, 1979

Date

PAI, Kenneth
Eastern Languages

ACADEMIC TITLE

CAMPUS

Report changes in home address, academic degrees, citizenship, and marriage

I. TEACHING (including University Extension teaching)
   1. Courses taught (including tutorials)
   2. New courses devised and instituted
   3. Systematic efforts undertaken to improve instruction
   4. Master and doctoral theses completed under your chairmanship (give names of students and titles of theses)
   5. Post-doctoral scholars supervised (give names)
   6. Academic advising activities

II. PUBLICATIONS, RESEARCH, AND OTHER CREATIVE ACTIVITY
   List all research and creative accomplishments, including works of art, musical compositions, and other activities of this nature. Cite only items not previously submitted.

   Give a full bibliographical citation for each item, or an equivalent reference if the work being cited is not represented in the form of publication. (Do not submit any material that is in progress or in press.) List separately publications for which you were supervisor but not co-author (indicate your role).
III. COMMITTEE SERVICE

1. Committees of the Academic Senate

2. Administrative committees

3. College, department or other University committees.

IV. PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. Invited lectures, papers at meetings and similar activities

2. Service to editorial boards of scholarly journals or other publications

3. Service to scholarly or professional societies

4. Service to educational or governmental agencies

5. Service to University Extension

V. SPECIAL APPOINTMENTS

Administrative posts (e.g., department officer, director of organized research unit, principal investigator)

VI. AWARDS

1. Prizes, honors, commendations

2. Fellowships and extra-mural grants