

THREE LIVES

HUALING NIEH

Table of Contents

[entries in red mark the passages included in this sample]

Prologue

Part I **The Big River, China (1925-1949)**

A: The Big River Flowing

The Reincarnated Lovers

Mother's Confession

The Rainbow Parasol

Grandpa and the Girl Called Truth

My Theater

The House of Mirth

The Return of the Soul

A Pair of Red Caps

Leaving Home

B: Wanderings

Song of Nostalgia

Sunset Serenade

Song of the Big River

On the Jialing River

Song of the Yellow River

Song of Fury

Beyond the Jade Gate

The Communists Are Coming

I Am from Manchuria

Fifty Years Later:

Tan Fengying--A Young Underground Communist's Story

Part II The Green Island, Taiwan (1949-1964)

Lei Chen---An Idealist's Fate

A Sample of Chinese Taste, September 4, 1960

Hu Shi--Left or Right?

Mother and Son

Red Roses

Who Cheated My Mother?

Chance--(April, 1963): Paul Engle

Part III The Deer Garden, Iowa (1964-1991)

Holding You by the Hand

A Bouquet of Letters

The Man from the Cornfields

1. Telling Stories

2. A Dialogue---The Iowa Writers' Workshop

Where Is the Wedding Ring?

Daughters

The Return to the Big River

Again, the Green Island

That Little Boat

Welcome to Auschwitz

Ding Ling versus Paul Engle

A Lonely Walk---Chen Yingzhen

The Man of Destiny---Vaclav Havel

Vignettes of the Deer Garden

Parting, 1991

When I Die (Unfinished, 1991): Paul Engle

Epilogue

Prologue:

I am a tree
 The roots are in China
 The trunk is in Taiwan
 The branches are in Iowa

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PART ONE: THE BIG RIVER, CHINA (1925-1949)

The Big River Flowing

The Reincarnated Lovers

Mother stood there, wearing a black brocade cheongsam, a long white silk scarf draping over her shoulder, a pair of black-rimmed glasses setting off her delicate pale skin, carrying a book in hand. She was half turning, smiling, one foot on tiptoe barely touching the ground behind her. She was about to go, yet not really leaving.

I kept the photo with me all through the eight years of the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945), the move from the China Mainland to Taiwan in 1949, and then the move to Iowa in 1964. That is how I always remember my mother.

I can now see her reclining against the draperies of the bronze four-post bed, her eyes on the book in her hand, softly chanting from *THE REINCARNATION OF LOVE* and other romantic novels of the late Qing dynasty. I would lean against her, listening to her chanting the verses in the novel. I loved the description of the heroine Meng Lijun in *THE REINCARNATION OF LOVE*:

*Beautiful at age fifteen,
 Graceful with every move,
 Eyebrows softly dark like distant mountains,
 Eyes brimming coldly like autumn waters
 And then there was the hero Huangpu Shaohua:
 Two arching eyebrows like willow leaves,
 Cheeks competing with peach blossoms,
 Bursting with ambition, by family heritage,
 Spurred by talent, to serve the state.*

How wonderful it sounded, the heroine Meng Lijun and the hero Huangpu Shaohua were

reincarnated as lovers. Huangpu Shaohua had been the Great Dipper, and Meng Lijun a fairy ordered by the Jade Emperor to descend to Earth to be reunited with Shaohua, a wish from her previous life. But mother stopped reading.

And then? Did they marry? I asked

Mother tossed the book to me: I must go. Read it yourself.

I can't. Too many strange words.

Then how could you follow the story when I was reading it?

I can tell by just listening to the sounds of the words.

Mother laughed: I've never heard of such a thing. Alright, suppose I tell you the story. Then I'll go to the Yeh's for mahjong, and you stay home.

In the province of Kunming, there was a man called Meng Shiyuan, and he had a daughter called Meng Lijun, she was beautiful at fifteen and her every move was graceful. I repeated what I had heard from Mother.

I just read it to you and you already know it by heart! Mother said.

Go on with the story, Mama.

Alright. The governor of Yunnan province had a son and a daughter. The girl was called Huangpu Changhua, and the son called Huangpu Shaohua.

And Huangpu Shaohua fell in love with Meng Lijun...

Am I telling the story, or you are?

Go on, Mama, I won't interrupt.

Now the Emperor's uncle Liu Jie had a son Liu Kuibi. He also loved Meng Lijun, and his father sent a matchmaker to ask for the girl's hand. Meng Lijun's father could not decide between the two suitors, so the match was going to be decided by an archery contest between the two youths. The winner will get the girl. Liu Kuibi lost, but he was not going to give up. He made his rival stay as a guest for the night and then set a fire, hoping to burn Huangpu to death. But his sister Liu Yanyu foiled his plan. She saved Huangpu Shaohua and eloped with him!

What about Meng Lijun?

What do you think she would do about Huangpu?

Cut him dead.

Mother looked at me and laughed. She said: *The Huangpu family residence was raided, and Liu Kuibi demanded Meng Lijun in marriage. Meanwhile Meng Lijun had ran away disguised as a man and changed her name to Li Junyu. She came out first class in the imperial examinations and was appointed Minister for Military Affairs. At her suggestion, the Emperor held an open contest to recruit talent. Huangpu Shaohua passed with honors and was appointed the Conquering General of the East on his victorious return from the front. On the other hand, the Liu father and son were convicted of conspiring with the enemy and thrown into jail. Huangpu Shaohua continued to look for Meng Lijun, but meanwhile had married Liu Yanyu. Now Meng Lijun and the Huangpu father and son were serving together in court under the Emperor, but she never disclosed herself.*

Will Meng Lijun really give up Huangpu Shaohua? I asked.

Mother opened the book and started chanting:

There is no need to clarify,

I will live my life as an official,

Why should I compromise for marriage,

As an virtuous official, my name will be spread."

Why doesn't she change back to girl's clothes and marry Huangpu Shaohua? I asked.

No, that is not good. A woman must have pride. Huangpu had already married Liu Yanyu, so Li Junyu does not want to change back to Meng Lijun.

Did she change back later?

Mother laughed and told me that Meng Lijun disclosed herself to her father and mother, but

would not change into girl's clothes to face Huangpu Shaohua. Later, when someone tried to pass herself off as Meng Lijun, the mother declared in the presence of the whole court that Li Junyu was none other than Meng Lijun. But even so, Meng Lijun herself would not acknowledge the fact.

Oh, come on, just acknowledge it.

The author was also a woman, called Chen Duanshen of the Qing Dynasty. A remarkable woman.

Mama, you are not like Meng Lijun. You are nee Sun, and then there is another wife nee Zhang, but you are both married to Father. We live in Hankou and they live in Wuchang.

Mother sighed: Mind your own business.

You and Father are destined from a previous life. But what about my previous life?

Mother tapped her finger lightly on my nose and said: You were my little devil, you.

Mother was a semi-liberated woman. Her once bound feet had been unbound and she was shod in embroidered silk shoes, very dainty looking. Mother was outspoken, intelligent and kept up with the times. Wearing her rimmed glasses, she looked very sophisticated, like one of the newly liberated women of the Republic. But on the other hand, I also heard her reading out some books expounding Confucianism such as *The Book of Virtues: A woman should pursue chastity and virtue, a man should emulate talent*. She could repeat *The Three Character Primer* by heart. But then she also kept the classic novels *Dream of the Red Mansions* and *Romance of the Western Chamber* on her bedside table for casual reading. I loved the illustrations of the beauties in these two books.

Mother would show me *Dream of Red Mansions*. She told me: This is great writing. She would make me repeat after her reading from the verses in the novel.

I would try to do it until I felt drowsy and my voice became lower and lower until it came to a lull.

I followed Mother wherever she went. When Mother was not reading, she would be out playing mahjong. If left behind, I would sit on the stairway and cry. The servant Zhang would hardly spare me a glance as he held my little brother in his arms. He would pat him softly on his back saying: My good little master, when little master grows up, he will be a great official, he will have a great house. He would say it in a singsong voice and even forgot his stammer. Then I would cry all the harder. Once I cried so hard that I fainted on the stairs and resumed crying when I revived.

Mother came back and found me crying. She kept saying: My little devil, little devil.

The city Hankou was divided into five foreign concessions: the Russian concession, the Japanese concession, the German concession, the French concession and the British concession. Later the Russian, German and British concessions were retrieved, leaving behind them a number of expatriates and compradors, but even so the former concessions were a separate district. Back Garden Street was the only truly Chinese area and a most interesting place, full of restaurants, shops, playgrounds, eateries, silk stores, jewelers, fur stores, and the "New Market". There we could find new talking shows (stage drama), flower-drum-song players, Wuhan local opera, Beijing opera, magicians, monkey shows, and plenty of girls in colorful dresses, smiling at passing men.

I loved window shopping with Mother in Back Garden Street. The silk stores were my favorite. The salesmen would push back the long sleeves of their gown and take down rolls and rolls of silk and satin, toss them on to the glass topped counter. Then they would pick up one roll and with a flick of the hand, unfurl the material gallantly. I would caress the soft material, letting one after another glide through my fingers.

I wanted them all!

Mother said: No! Choose one, for a lined dress.

I would plant myself there, refusing to budge.

Alright, two pieces.

The salesman took up a long and pointed knife and said to Mother: I can cut off a strip from each roll for Miss to examine at leisure and come back for anything she would like.

I went home happily with a bundle of strips and laid them out on Mother's big bronze bed, gazing at the rainbow of colors as I crouched down beside them. Sky blue, lake blue, watery green, orange, pink—I loved them all, but was allowed to take only two pieces. Our family dressmaker was in for a

hard time. The sky blue silk cheongsan, bordered with white, was finished in two days.

I put it on happily and looked at myself in the mirror in Mother's bedroom, front and back, left and right, twisting myself this way and that way. I ran down the stairs to the dressmaker.

I said: This won't do. The fringe is too wide.

Yes, I'll change it immediately.

The sleeves are too long.

I'll cut them shorter.

The shoulders are too narrow.

That is hard to fix.

You've got to fix it!

Miss, it is easy to fix the shoulders if they are too wide, but how can you fix it when too narrow?

You've got to fix the narrow shoulders!

The dressmaker shook his head in frustration: Then the only thing I can do is to make you a new dress.

But that was the last piece in the store.

There must be other choices of pretty silks.

No, this sky blue is the only kind I want. Nothing else will do.

What do you want me to do? I'll go to the Mistress to acknowledge my fault, and ask her to try other stores.

That same day, Mother took me to Back Garden Street again.

Mother went to the Yeh's place to play mahjong. I always went along. Master Yeh has one official lady and two concubines. The Master and Mistress had no children. Concubine Jia was taken in for the purpose of producing sons. And give birth she did, three in a row. Thus her position in the Yeh household was secure. As for Concubine Zhao, she had been a star in the local opera troupe. Master Yeh had been a fan of hers, and ended up installing her in a house in the French concession. Later Master Yeh talked the Mistress round and Zhao was accepted into the mansion. She always carried about her a whiff of perfume, perhaps from the string of jasmine blossoms she always wore on her breast. Her voice when she spoke was whispery soft, especially in the presence of Master Yeh, and she could even smile and signal with her eyes. The three women of the Yeh household each kept to her own place and discharged her own duties, at peace with each other. Mother's arrival made up a fourth, perfect for a round of mahjong. I didn't play with the boys in their household, male and female should keep their distance after all. I just loved to listen to the gossips over the mahjong table. Such as: The fourth concubine of the Lee's has killed herself by swallowing a lump of opium. Why? The mistress of the house tormented her; and the master is hooked up with a new love, Jade Bracelet, the Beijing opera star, and stays away for days on end. The Master of the Wang's is sick, the maid of the Mistress, Spring Moon, is offered to him as a concubine, to counter misfortune by her virginity, the old wolf had violated the girl anyway. The fifth concubine of the Hsieh's was doing IT with the master's adjutant. They were surprised by the Master; he took out his sword and cut them both down.

One of the mahjong players would comment: Those warlords! They are laying up a debt of retribution.

At Mother's mahjong table, there were endless stories.

Mother was shrewd, kind and intelligent. Mrs. Yeh, concubine Jia and concubine Zhao all regarded her as a confidante. They nicknamed Mother Three Ears.

Mrs. Yeh said to Mother: Running the household, I am fair. The two concubines each have ten yuan for pocket money every month. The Master spends two nights in Jia's bedroom weekly, and two nights in Zhao's bedroom.

Mother laughed: You shameless old thing, you keep three nights to yourself!

Mrs. Yeh guffawed: I must keep him under control. His health is important, after all. He wanted to spend three nights with Zhao, but I said no, and he did as he was told.

Mother asked: what are your tricks to keep the old man under your thumb?

Mrs. Yeh said laughing: It's not what you are thinking. One must be fair. Listen to me, Three Ears,

to keep your man at home, the only way is to let him have his women. You want your woman, okay, but the minute she enters this household, I am in control.”

Mother said: I think he is afraid of you.

Afraid? Oh, no! If he doesn't listen to me, he can't bring his women to this house. My advice--let him bring them in. Rather than have him chasing skirts all over town. We can't have everything no matter how much we scheme. It's all in the stars.”

Jia complained to Mother: He comes to my room out of a sense of duty. After all, the three sons are mine, how can he ignore me? He usually disappears the minute he returns. Dives straight into the room of that minx. She can coax and wheedle. Not me, I am a plain honest woman, minding my own business.

One day when no one else was around, Zhao said: Three Ears, come to my room, let me show you something.

Zhao took a brocade box out of a redwood dresser, opened it and took out a pale green jade bracelet. Smiling she said: he bought it for me. Originally from the royal palace, heaven knows how it ended up outside. The owner needed money, so he got it for me. Bought it on the sly, she added.

Mother smiled and said: I understand.

Now he must figure out how to lie his way out of this awful expense. Then Zhao turned to me: No talking!

*

Mother's Confession

I was twenty years old in the 12th year of the Republic [1923], when I was married into the Nieh clan. In those days, girls were married in their teens. You never heard of a girl waiting till twenty to get married. Fortunately I was twenty, or your Dad would have gotten off with more advantage in this marriage--he was twelve years my senior. Hualing, when your Mama was young, people used to admire her beauty, with sparkling eyes and pearl white teeth. Actually, youth is always beautiful, unless you are some kind of freak. Your maternal grandma dismissed all the match makers. Your grandpa was a loafer and had no say in the matter. It was Grandma who made the decisions in the house. She used to say: My daughter is not going to marry just anybody, it must be an established family, and the bridegroom must be an upstanding young man.

Another matchmaker arrived and took out a photograph from her pouch. Your grandma took one look and was impressed. Um, she said, piercing eyes, thick eyebrows, firm brow, graduate of Baoding Army Academy and the National Military Institute, regiment commander in his thirties. With such a resume, why not already married?

The matchmaker had her answer ready: It was the revolution, madam, it was war, his life was not his own, how could he think of marriage?

Your Grandma said: Um, we have a son and a daughter. A fortune teller predicted that our daughter is destined for greatness. Could this be the man destined to bring her greatness? Grandpa lying on the opium couch took a look at the photograph and also agreed. Marriage was ultimately decided by the Elders of the clan. Relatives close and distant showed up accordingly. They all approved, saying: "Talent matched with beauty, a match made in heaven." Made in heaven! Put my foot in my mouth! A disaster cooked in hell, I'd say.

To say that your father acquired me by a trick is not an exaggeration. Your father was a decent man, and I was not exactly a ravishing beauty. His father was searching with a fengshui expert for a suitable place for your great grandpa's gravesite and came upon a truly auspicious site, what could be described as harboring crouching tigers and hidden dragons, a sure sign of coming greatness for the

Nieh's. Grandpa already had two grandsons by his only son, your Dad, but he wanted a houseful of grandchildren. Like a gambler, he would have better chances of winning if he put down more stakes. Since his son was away from home all the time, it made sense to get him another wife. Grandpa gave the order, and your father set about looking for a bride.

Freedom in marriage? Are you kidding? In a small backwater place like Yichang at the time, there was no idea of freedom. I had been taught by a private tutor, and read The Three Word Primer, The Hundred Family Names, The Book of Female Virtues, The Twenty-four Filial Pieties, The Analects and so on. Dream of Red Mansions, one of the classics, was forbidden. How dare a good girl touch such porn! My feet had been bound briefly. With the coming of the Republic, cutting the hair short and liberating the bound feet became the norm. I didn't cut my plaits, but I liberated my feet. You are right, Hualing, the unbound feet looked dainty and that set off the embroidered shoes. Oh, so you still remember my head of shining black hair? When I was a girl I had two long plaits which I swung to and fro. Unmarried girls did not wear their hair in buns. Only when she had shaved her face hair can a young woman wear her hair in a bun. Shaving the face was a big event. Unmarried girls did not shave, only married woman did. Only a woman blessed with good fortune would be asked to shave the bride. She would stretch two crisscrossing lengths of thread across the face to shave off the facial hair. It did feel good after the shaving. You ask if I was afraid. Of course I was. At home I had my way in everything. Your Grandpa and Grandma had spoiled me rotten. Now, about to be married, I would be on my own. I had never met the person I was to marry. No matter what a man he was—a three-headed six-arm monster or an idol of male beauty, I was stuck to him for life. I actually had to sleep with him! When the flowered sedan chair arrived, I cried as if at my own funeral. Your Grandma also cried and said to me: In the Nieh household, don't throw tantrums, maintain harmony in marriage, serve your parents-in-law, you must be the mainstay of the family. I actually did end up as the mainstay of the family, running the house, taking care of my parents-in-law and the children. Let me tell you, Hualing, dealing with such a big family, the elders and the youngsters, the internal and the external affairs, you had to be not only smart, but also enduring. One must bear up and be tolerant. Otherwise minor problems will snowball into major disasters.

To be fair, I must say that your Dad was good to me, letting me have my way in everything. But I would often fly into a temper over nothing at all. Once I was sitting in front of my dressing table when he lifted the door flap and came in. He stood behind me watching me stick an orchid into my bun. He said, looking at my image in the mirror: How pretty you are. But—sometimes you are not. I stood up and said: I am not pretty enough for you, go and look for a pretty one somewhere else.

You want to know how I found out he had already been married? I really don't want to go over it again. At the time, you were seven or eight months old. One morning the maid who did the washing found a letter in a pocket of his jacket. She showed it to me: "Is this important?" The letter began with "My honorable father..." in calligraphic script. It ended with saying that mother sends regards and so on. In a split second, my world was spinning and I flopped on my bed. He lied to me! Lied to my parents! Lied to the whole Sun clan! What am I in his family? Can I go on living with him? I was angry, resentful and deeply saddened. I wanted to die. Only my death could punish him for as long as he lived. To die. To be dead on his return. Swallow opium, swallow a lump of gold. My phoenix-and-dragon gold ring was right on my finger. Take it off. Down it with a glass of water, and all will be over. You were sitting on the bed, waving your little hands, smiling at me, asking me to hold you. I got up and held you in my arms, walking to and fro in the room. I looked at our family photo—I was sitting on a chair, in an open-collared jacket over an embroidered skirt, holding you in my arms, he was standing beside me, in his uniform. I thought how good he had been to me, and couldn't bear to part. I couldn't bear to desert you. Let me tell you this. If you want to suicide, do it immediately. When the moment passes, you will never be able to bring yourself to do it. As for me, umph— Mother smiled in self-mockery—I not only didn't die that day, but had eight children with him.

When you were around one year old, we moved from the city of Yichang to Hankou, one of the triple towns making up the provincial capital of Wuhan— Wuchang, Hankou, Hanyang. That was the 15th year of the Republic, in 1926. We settled in Hankou, while your father's other family was in Wuchang. Have you ever heard of Wuchang being sealed off? The Revolutionary Army of the Republic was attacking the warlord Wu Peifu. It was the warlord Era, whoever had arms was in power. There

were also warlords within the Revolutionary Army. There were many different factions among the warlords. The Zhi faction, the Feng faction, the Wan faction and so on. They fought right and left, against this one today, against that one tomorrow, sometimes holding a truce, sometimes breaking out into hostilities. A complete mess, no sense at all. The Baoding Military Academy and the Huangpu Military Academy stood for two opposing camps, and Chiang Kai-shek was the leader of the latter. Chiang had been battling the Gui faction on and off for years and finally destroyed it. Your father was tossed about in those factional wars: The warlord Wu Peifu was from the Baoding Army Academy and so was your Dad. Thus when Wu controlled the city of Wuhan, your Dad was chief-of-staff of the Hubei 1st Division. When the Revolutionary Army took Wuhan, the commander of the Revolutionary 8th Army was Tang Shengzhi, another Baoding man, thus your Dad was appointed his military attaché. When Tang was defeated and the revitalized Gui faction gained control of Wuhan, Hu Zongduo, again a Baoding man, was commander at the Garrison Headquarters and your Dad became his chief-of-staff.

In the 18th year of the Republic, 1929, there was a coup in Wuhan, the controlling Gui faction was again ousted. Hu Zongduo of the Garrison Headquarters had to step down, and so did your Dad. Many members of the Gui faction escaped to Hong Kong, others left for abroad. Some were arrested and died in jail, some were summarily shot. Our extended family with so many members had no choice but to move into the Japanese concession, like fugitives. Our family and your Father's other family both moved into the Japanese concession. All the concessions in Hankou had been taken back, except for the Japanese concession. Thus the Japanese concession became the refuge for many political refugees. The Chinese police could not enter the concession to arrest people. Many surviving members of the Gui faction were there. They frequently held secret meetings, discussing ways to deal with Chiang's Central government. One day your father was informed by his friends that plain clothes men were being smuggled into the concession to arrest political opponents. Your father hid in the garret of a Japanese nurse at the Tongren Hospital. Yes, you are right, she was Auntie Nakane from Japan. I went to visit him. The garret was tiny, with hardly standing space. Your Dad wanted me to stay, saying: We don't need a big room. The smaller the better. You are laughing, Hualing, but remember, your parents also had their share of youth, bubbling with vitality and emotions.

The Gui faction was eliminated and your Dad went into hiding again. After idling away eight years, he was appointed as the Chief of several districts of the province Guizhou, doubling as the Security Commander of that area. One of his duties was to fight the Red Army that was on its Long March. But he had no army. He was of the Gui faction after all, and Chiang Kai-shek's government had diverted his men. With no army yet expected to fight, he was bound for destruction. Your Dad was like one of those ill-fated women who married a series of men who died one after another. Your Grandpa had said: A man "rises up in wrath and rules the land." So he named your Father Nufu, the man of wrath. How could he rule the land? He could hardly take care of his own wife and children, and he lost his own life in the bargain.

.....

Miss Tao, Miss Tao, everybody called her Miss Tao. This was all from several decades ago, Hualing, but I must tell you the story of Miss Tao.

It was around the 17th or the 18th year of the Republic (1928-29), when she started visiting at our house in the former Russian Concession. One wouldn't call her good looking, but she was trim, charming, bright, quick with words. At the time, the Gui faction was in control of Wuhan, and your Dad was posted at the Garrison Command. She was a single woman, with nothing to her name, and I tried to be nice to her. When she visited, I showed her my silks, my satins, my jewelry, my tailored dresses. All laid at her disposal. We became good friends. She told me a lot about the world outside: Workers at the Egg Processing Plant are on strike. Students have cut class and are demonstrating in the streets. Japanese sailors have beaten Chinese rickshaw coolies to death. The Northern Expeditionary Army just victoriously cracked down on the war lords, and the red-white-blue flags of the Republic are flying all over Beijing. The Garrison Command in Hankou has arrested a number of

underground communists and turned up a lot of handguns and bombs...

Miss Tao also talked about equality between men and women, and freedom of marriage. When your dad and his friends went to the Yangtse Grand Hotel to feast and play mahjong, the wives would accompany them but set up their mahjong tables separately. On those occasions, Miss Tao would also show up. She is an independent woman, after all, as she would say. She never played, but sat by as we played and chatted. When the men talked politics, she sometimes put in a word. We wives were not interested--if heaven collapses, let the men hold it up.

Later on, as I said, the Gui faction was out, and we went into hiding in the Japanese concession. The plain clothes police could go in and out without being detected by the Japanese, and your Dad was tailed by a spy. One day your elder brother found a letter stuck between the rails of the iron gate, and showed it to your Dad. It was a letter of blackmail, warning that the whole Nieh clan will be wiped out.

Your Dad said: now we must leave.

I said: with all the family to care for as I am here, you better leave alone.

He said: we must leave together. You are not safe in Hankou either. We could first go to Shanghai and wait until the situation in Wuhan calms down. We have friends in Shanghai, and more access to information as to what's going on.

So your Dad took us to Shanghai by a Japanese-owned boat, while your grandpa took your elder brother to Japan. Grandma stayed behind in the Japanese concession with the rest of the family.

Your father's aide-de-camp Tian Qinghe packed all things for travel in the trunks and huge wicker-baskets. I poked around one of the wicker-baskets, looking for The Heavenly Rain Flower, hoping to read it on the trip, and came up with two pearl-gauze mosquito nets. Why should we need two nets for one bed? I asked Tian Qinghe. He said: it was by order of the Master. I went into the room and asked your Dad. He was after all an honest man, and his face flushed. I asked him: You have somebody else? He didn't answer. I suddenly saw it all. It is Miss Tao Yaozhu, isn't it? Still no answer. I walked up to him and slapped his face, then threw myself on the bed and cried.

He came over to me, sat on the bed and took my hand in his.

He said: I am sorry, but you must know my feelings for you. I didn't mean to cheat on you. Let me tell you the long and short of the whole affair. You don't want to hear it? I will tell you anyway. When I first met Tao Yaozhu, she was a teenager. At the time, my father was teaching in the Hunan-Hubei Academy of Classical Studies in Wuhan, and I had just graduated from the elementary school and enrolled in the No. 3 Middle School of the Army, in the same class as Miss Tao's brother Tao Yaozong. I often went to their home, and thought the little girl really cute. Whenever I showed up, she would toss back her plaits with a shrug of her shoulders and leave the room. Years later I found out that her parents had wanted a match between me and their daughter. But at the time I had already married on orders from my parents. When I was twenty, the Revolution to overthrow the Qing Dynasty broke out, I threw myself into the student army along with Tao Yaozong. We made speeches in the streets of Wuchang and Hanyang, explained the aims of the Revolution to overthrow the Qing Dynasty, mobilized group after group of young people to join the army, and appealed for donations to support the Revolution. In Hanyang, the Revolutionary Army battled against the imperial army. When they were out of munitions, Tao and I went and raided the arsenal of the imperial army's regiment and loaded a boatful of cartridges to support the Revolutionary Army. In the process, Tao was killed while I was wounded. After the Revolution, in the 3rd year of the Republic, I was enrolled in the Baoding Army Academy, and in the 7th year of the Republic, I was enrolled in the Military Institute. I was away from home and lost touch with the Tao family. In the 16th year of the Republic, I was appointed to the Wuhan Garrison Command. One day, I was told that I had a visitor, Miss Tao. It turned out to be Tao Yaozhu. She had already graduated from Teachers' College and had become a teacher. I did not want her to visit me in my office, and I also wanted you to know her, so I asked you to invite her to the house. You were good to her, and you two became friends, that made me happy.

She was well-informed and had ideas of her own, and often phoned me at the Command headquarters. Gradually she talked more about her own life and personal feelings. She told me that she had always cared for me and that I was the only man she had wanted. One thing led to another, and before I knew it, I got involved.

Your Dad vowed that he would never see her again. Let me tell you, Hualing, at that time, it was just the norm for men to have affairs. Your Dad was not the worst. If I let my temper get the better of me, I could just get up and leave. But where could I go? And I couldn't leave you children. And your Dad was really a loving husband. So I swallowed my resentment, bowed to fate, and we went on our way to Shanghai. That was the 19th year of the Republic. The next year, we still couldn't return to Wuhan, because your Dad as a member of the Gui faction, was labelled a traitor. For the sake of the children's education, we went to Beijing.

One day your Dad received a letter from a friend in Wuhan. He turned to me and said: Tao Yaozhu has disappeared. She was an underground Communist! No wonder she tried all her charms to get close to me while I was at the Wuhan Garrison Command.

Mother was silent a while. Then she sighed and said: Being a woman doesn't matter much.

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[...]

The House of Mirth

The Chinese New Year's Eve of 1935 was the most festive one in the Nieh family. My grandma had passed away two years before, and during the period of mourning, the New Year was observed as a formality, our hearts were not in it. In the year 1935 however, Mother had given birth to my youngest brother Huatong, and during the previous summer, Father had been appointed to his post in Pingyue, Guizhou province. Grandpa was in a happy mood. After all, his son was the Civil Chief of one of the district of Guizhou province, doubling as its Security Commander, taking on both civil and military positions. From times immemorial, famous leaders have sprung from the ranks of the military. The year 1935 had brought along double happiness. But Father's letter from Guizhou was not reassuring. He wrote: No three clear days in a row, no plain stretching three miles without a bump, and no man has three ounces of silver. He said that his title as Chief of Security was an empty shell, that Chiang Kai-shek's government had recalled all the troops, that not being a member of Chiang's circle, it was impossible for him to perform as the Security official. And the Red Army on its Long March could attack Pingyue anytime. Father wanted Mother to stay in Wuhan, and wait till spring when hopefully the situation might improve, when she should go to join him with all four children. Father had not yet seen the newly born Huatong.

Mother busied herself over the New Year preparations. The living room was in a blaze of festive red. A tablecloth embroidered with a frolicking dragon-and-phoenix design covered the eight-immortal table, while the embroidered red brocade covered the mahogany chairs on either side. Ancestral tablets were placed in the center of the eight-immortal table, and flanked on either side with bright red candles carved with gold designs. Smoke wafted from the bronze incense burner while the charcoal fire blazed in the pagoda-shaped white bronze burner in the middle of the room. The unique combination of color, light, and aroma could only be found on the Eve of the New Year, and made you want to shout in delight, set off fire crackers. Gamble with all the silver dollars you might receive as New Year gifts in the red envelopes, play poker or dice or mahjong, or whatever. Outside, snowflakes were drifting. Grandpa in a black brocade long gown lined with fox fur, sat in a high-

backed chair, smoking his water pipe which had been polished by the servant Zhang to a burnished brightness. He pointed to the Taoist Trigrams carved into the lattice work of the bronze burner and said: Come on, Hualing, let me teach you how to read these symbols. Heavenly three line-ups, Earthly six break-downs. Mother said softly: Dad, why don't you teach her after the New Year. Mother had warned us first thing in the morning that on the New Year days, we must not break anything and we should not breathe any inauspicious word. The character for "break-down" could also mean "ending", as in the ending of life, and thus should not be uttered on New Year's Eve.

We went through the rituals of offering to the gods, worshipping our ancestors, and kowtowing to our elders. Firecrackers were set off, and all the children and servants were blessed with silver dollars wrapped in the red envelopes. After the New Year's Eve feast, we children were free to gamble or do whatever we wanted, no one could say nay, not even Grandpa. The cook, the servants, the ahma, the wet nurse, the dressmaker--- all of them got their gifts of silver dollars in the red envelopes. Mother was in exceptionally high spirits and asked everyone into the living room to gamble with dice. Mother hosted the game, and we gambled with our silver dollars. All of us crowded around the table, some sitting, some standing, prepared to play all night. The coral-like fire in the pagoda-shaped burner blazed cheerfully; firecrackers popped off all around us greeting the New Year. The room reverberated now and again with the sounds of shouting

I sat across from my younger brother Hanchong. The servant Zhang did not join in the game but stood behind my brother, protecting him. When the young master won, he collected the money for him. When he lost, Zhang was glum. The pile of silver dollars kept growing in front of me. Hanchong was losing in a row. He had by now stood up, his face flaming red.

It was his turn to throw. He took up three dice.

"Blow on it, young master, blow!" Zhang had lost his stammer in his excitement, and his eyes were blazing. It was a matter of life and death.

Everyone's eyes were riveted on Hanchong.

Mother said to him, laughing: Don't expect me to make it up for you if you lose.

Hanchong nodded and threw. His eyes popping, he followed the three pieces of dice as they rolled, rolled and rolled in the bowl. Four Five Six! Four Five Six! Four Five Six! Oh-h-h, Four Three Six! The room exploded in shouts of excitement. Brother sat down, silent, his eyes blinking in disbelief.

Zhang was sore, saying, "Our yo—young m—master is ge-generous, h-he doesn't care."

Mother smiled and swept the shining silver dollar in front of him onto her own side.

On the third day of the New Year, Mother took me out to offer the customary greetings to friends and relatives.

Happy New Year, Mother said in a loud voice as we entered the gate of the Yeh residence.

It was unusually quiet, unlike the past when Mrs. Yeh and the two concubines, Jia and Zhao, would all come out to greet her.

Happy New Year, Mother repeated joyfully.

Zhao responded listlessly: Happy New Year. May all your wishes be fulfilled.

Then she turned around and called out: Three Ears is here!

Mrs. Yeh and Jia emerged from their respective bedrooms. After greeting each other, they walked into the parlor. Zhao was one step ahead and swept the newspaper lying on the stand down to the floor beneath.

Mother sat down on the sofa next to the stand and said: I'm here to play mahjong, why don't we get started.

No one answered her.

Mother looked at them and said: What's the matter with you people today?

Jia said: Nothing. We are burned out on these New Year days.

Mother stood up and said: Why don't you take it easy, I'll go on elsewhere to make some late New Year greetings. Let's get together for mahjong later.

Then she saw the newspaper lying on the floor and picked it up.

Zhao snatched it out of her hand, saying: Let's play mahjong, forget about the New Year visits.

Mother asked again, looking at Zhao in the eye: Is something wrong?

Zhao insisted: Nothing is wrong.

No more mahjong, Mother turned to me and said: Come on, let's go home.

The Yeh family also lived in the Japanese concession, on the same street as we did. Mother walked back thoughtfully, not saying a word. Once home, she went straight to the table in the living room for the Wuhan Daily News which lay unopened. Mother spread out the paper. On the first page appeared the headline in large block letters:

Nieh Nufu, Security Commander, Pingyue, killed by the Red Army.

It was the year 1936, the third day of the first month by the lunar calendar. The Long March of the Communist Red Army had already passed through the province Guizhou and arrived in North Shaanxi province by October, 1935. But one division of the Red Army was still roving around in the province Guizhou and had just fought their way through Pingyue.

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[...]

PART TWO: THE GREEN ISLAND, TAIWAN (1949-1964)

[...]

Who Cheated My Mother?

Mother would be sixty by the seventh of the sixth month of 1962. It was twenty-eight years since Father's sudden death, and eleven years since the death of her first born son, Hanchong. She had survived between two extremes of being: playing mahjong and contemplation.

She would often play through the night, or lie in bed deep in thought. Mother lost her usual sense of humor and esprit. All I want is the 60th birthday celebration, she would say. It was just two months to the date. Mother had caught a cold, coughing incessantly, and the medicine she took was no help. I took Mother to the hospital affiliated to the medical school of the University of Taiwan. The doctor took an X-ray and took me aside. He said that Mother had lung cancer, already spread beyond cure. I begged him to keep the news from Mother. I did not want her to be dying in despair, I wanted her to live on in hope. I held back my tears and told Mother that she had bronchitis.

I was at her side day and night in her ward, watching her wasting away. She was kept in hospital solely for the purpose of getting injections to relieve her pain.

Mother said: Hualing, I am not getting better, but it can't be serious, as you are so cheerful. She looked through the window at the people bustling about and said: To be able to walk is a blessing. When I get better, I will be able to take Weiwei and Lanlan out for fun.

Yes, of course. I will comb your hair and pin on a S-shaped bun for you. When I was a child, how I loved watching you comb your hair, your S-shaped bun was black and shiny.

Her sunken lips smiled: My hair is almost all gone.

I looked at Mother's swollen face and didn't want to continue the subject. Your hair will grow back, I told her. I have changed your curtains, Mom. Sky blue. When you are back, you'll have the room brighter.

Good, all I want is to go home. To tell you the truth, I coughed so hard this morning, couldn't get my breath back. Mother pointed to her neighbor in the ward. Lowering her voice she said: She thought I had TB and hid her head under the blankets, afraid of infection. Don't tell her it's bronchitis, let her go on worrying, Mother smiled in mischief. Then she added: When your Dad passed away, I turned into an old woman overnight, all I wanted then was to live to sixty, to see you children on your own feet.

But you were only thirty-two at the time!

It is the heart aging. An old woman of thirty-two. Mother smiled in self-mockery.

Mom, I said, and couldn't go on.

Mother looked at me, waiting for me to finish the sentence.

With Dad gone, did you ever think of remarrying?

Never. Never Ever. I had you children. Nowadays of course, a second marriage is no big deal, but not then. When my maternal grandfather was dying, my grandmother was only nineteen years old. Grandfather could not breathe his last. He caught the little finger of his young wife between his teeth, making her vow never to remarry. She vowed: Living I am a member of the Chen clan, dead I am a ghost of the Chen's. I have no offspring, I will adopt a son of your brother's. Only then did my grandfather let go her little finger, closed his eyes and breathed his last. Mother was overcome by a fit of coughing, her hands rubbing her breast.

Does it hurt?

She nodded, still coughing.

I held Mother's hand in mine. My heart was also aching.

She finally discharged a glob of mucus, mixed with blood. She went on saying: Let me tell you, Hualing, when your Dad died, I never ever thought of remarrying. I just wanted to die. But I survived. Then when your brother Hanchong died, I again wanted to die, and again survived. You are all doing well, and I am content. Truly content. All I want is a jolly get-together for my 60th birthday. You are all doing well. I have done my duty to the Nieh clan. This disease is a nuisance. All I want is a 60th birthday celebration. It will be like finally I'm getting my due.

Mom, next year we'll celebrate your sixtieth birthday. It's a promise.

Good. Next year. For sure. I want you all around me. I want you all to kowtow to me. Mom laughed in self-mockery.

Yes, two generations will kowtow to you.

Very good. Next year, your brother Huatong will be back from Harvard. Don't forget, you promised to give me a diamond ring. Oh no. No, I don't want it. You have spent so much over my medical bills.

One of these days, your son and daughter will give you a golden mahjong set.

Remember, that's a promise!

Of course!

A doctor and nurse entered. I told them that Mother had just had a bad fit of coughing.

The doctor nodded and said: We'll draw water from her lungs.

Mother gave one look at the thick glass tube in the doctor's hand and clasped my hand. The nurse and I helped mother sit up. The nurse held Mother by the shoulders and lifted the flap of her shirt. I held mother's hand with my own two hands. The doctor took out a thick glass tube with a long needle attached. He inserted the head of the needle into Mother's back. I could not bear the sight, and turned my face away. Mother didn't make a sound, but her hand was tightening in my grip.

The doctor left, and Mother lay down without a word, her eyes closed. After a while she said in a faint voice: It hurt so much. I want to live, I can bear the pain, I am not ready to die. I want to live another ten years, another twenty years. No. With this illness, I can't live that long. All I want is another two years. To live happily for another two years. To see Huatong get his Ph.D. To see Huatong married.

Finally I got the doctor's permission to take Mother home with me, bringing with us his prescription. She was very cheerful, thinking that it meant she was on the way to recovery. But she was wasting away daily before my eyes.

One night at midnight, Mother called out to me. I walked into her room, and got the shock of my life. Mother had totally changed to another person, her eyes staring out of her face, shining with a piercing cold light.

Sit down! Listen to me! Don't interrupt.

Thus she talked through the night. How she had been tricked into marrying my father, how she had to pick her way through the viper's nest of the big family, all the insults and injuries she had suffered after Father's sudden violent death, how she single-mindedly placed her hopes on her children. She had given away my younger sister; although it was to a close friend and bond sister, Mother had always felt guilty. She missed Huatong studying at Harvard, and looked forward to his marriage to Su Duanyi and the couple coming back together. She was worried about my marriage.

Hualing, do you think I don't know what you are going through? Married for thirteen years, barely five years together, and most of those years spent in bickering. Now that he's in America these last five years, you even seem happier. One night, you two could be heard quarrelling the minute you returned home from teaching---before you could sit down to a bite of food! The next day our neighbor Mr Yin told me: I stomped about in my room, absolutely furious. Hualing should divorce him, he said. I said: Oh no, never. Think of the two children. I had never approved of this marriage in the first place, but now you just have to put up with it. And anyway, Hualing, sometimes you are wild! Laughing out loud like a man, no care for propriety. From my room, I can hear you chatting and laughing with your friends, your behavior is not fit for a well-bred woman.

Mother went on to talk about the death of my brother Hanchong, her eldest son, who died on

a training mission in the Air Force in Taiwan at the age 25. For her, life was a way of dying and dying was a way of living. It was then that she gave up Buddhism and didn't believe in any thing.

In the middle of a sentence, Mother suddenly stopped, her eyes distant. She gazed at me without seeing.

I cried, Mama, go on, Mama, I want to hear it all. What is wrong?

She continued to stare at me without seeing. She had left this world, and entered that other region of no return.

I shook her shoulders, Mama, speak to me! Mama, I want to hear the rest. Spit out what's on your mind. Speak! Mama!

Mother looked around: Where am I? Where am I?

Mama, you are in Taiwan. In your own home. With me here.

Taiwan? Who are you?

I am Hualing!

She kept gazing at me: Oh, it's Hualing. Where am I?

In Taiwan. We're all here in Taiwan.

Where is Hanchong?

He is here.

Where is your Dad?

Dad is here too.

Ah, we're all together. Good. Ah, altogether, altogether.

Suddenly her face hardened, she turned a pair of icy cold eyes on me and said: Liar, Hualing, liar! Stop lying to me! Don't cheat me anymore! Tears streamed down her face.

After a pause, she said: I have been cheated all my life.

Mother was again hospitalized, never went home again.

She was very quiet, holding on to life. Occasionally she would say a few words:

When I get well, even if I could just take one step on my own, I will enjoy it to the full.

When I get well, I'll walk out of the hospital on my own. I won't say "See you again" to the doctors. "See you again" means going back to the hospital. I'm not going back. I'll just say "Thank you."

When I get well, I'll plant flowers in the garden. I'll grow grapes, and brew wine.

When I get well, I'll cuddle my little grandson, I'll play with your girls Weiwei and Lanlan. I didn't realize that these are the blessings of life. This illness has opened my eyes.

When I get well, I'll never grump again. Just to go on living is such a blessing. What's there to be grumpy about?

Weiwei and Lanlan are boarders at Sacred Heart School. Mother had brought up Weiwei single-handed. She had kept all the letters that Weiwei had written her. She would sometimes take them out from under her pillow, and say: Just looking at Weiwei's letters makes me happy. When I was holding her as a baby, I thought that I would never live long enough to see her in high school, but now there she is, a high school student.

Mother closed her eyes and smiled.

On Sunday I took the two girls to see her. Weiwei had made an embroidered handkerchief for her.

Mother took the handkerchief. She said with a smile: Weiwei, I've not loved you in vain. She put the handkerchief by her pillow and patted it gently: I'll leave it here where I can always touch it. I miss you two girls so much. When I get well, I'll take you out on weekends. We'll go to the movies, eat at the eateries, walk around in the park. How about that?

Weiwei said Yes and turned away. She burst out crying the minute she was out of the room.

I stayed with Mother day and night, sleeping on a chair by her bedside. I was away to teach very morning on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Mother was always glad to see me as I walk into the ward. One evening, as I returned to the hospital, the long corridor was eerily quiet, illuminated by a ghastly light which pointed toward the end of the corridor where the morgue was. I was not afraid, I walked as if I had been walking down that path all my life, alone, heading toward the end of the corridor.. I was jolted back to consciousness as I passed Mother's ward--Mother was lying on the bed,

waiting for me. She was sleeping, and I did not wake her up. I stayed awake all night, gazing at her, listening to her gentle breathing.

Mother woke up at dawn,. Seeing me by her side she clasped my hand and said: With you by my side, I am at peace. Do you know what I have been thinking of these last few days? Your Dad! It's almost thirty years he's been gone, why should I miss him so much now? Lying alone in bed, I often imagine him walking into the room and smiling, without saying a word. I would ask him: "How come you are here? You have left me to deal with a hard life alone, now that the children are grown up, you want to reap the fruit of my hard work through all those years?" He smiled and said: "I have come for my old companion." I nodded and said: "You couldn't have come at a better time.

I rubbed Mother's hand, kneading her fingers gently one by one, and then massaged her poor emaciated hands. My hands moved upward to massage her wrists, her arms. Mother smiled without opening her eyes as she said: Good, good, go on, don't stop. When you stop, I'll worry that you are gone.

One night Mother told me to go home and get a good night's sleep.

I went home and sat in Mother's empty bedroom. I wanted to breathe the air lingering with Mother's final breath. The room was pitch dark—a pool of frozen blackness and I was in the center of the pool. A dragonfly was buzzing around the room. I caught it with a swing of my hand. As I held it by its quivering wings I used my other hand to snatch a torn piece of newspaper from the waste paper basket and enclosed the dragonfly, twisting the edges of the paper together to secure it. I was about to throw the whole thing out the window when I felt a quivering under the paper wrapping. I changed my mind and dropped the thing in the wastepaper basket. Then I returned to my bedroom and went to bed. But I couldn't sleep. In the infinite vastness of time and space, a dragonfly and I seemed fated to meet. The dragonfly's wings still quivered faintly on my fingers. It was life, the life that my Mother ached for. I jumped up from my bed, fished out the twisted piece of paper, released the dragonfly and threw it out the window, under the phoenix tree. There was a little blue flower growing under the tree. The sun will be out again tomorrow and the dragonfly will fly again. It had started raining. I heard the raindrops pitter-pattering on the leaves of the phoenix tree, beating down on the tattered piece of paper. I could hear the quivering of the dragonfly's wings.

The next morning, I rushed to hospital as if I would miss seeing Mother if I were one minute late.

You're early! Mother greeted me as if we had been parted a long time. Hualing, hear this, it is so funny. She lowered her voice—her voice was hoarse with coughing: last night I coughed and coughed. The daughter of my ward mate had sat on my side of her mother's bed. Thinking I had TB, she hastily moved to the other side, away from me. Mother winked at me. Let her think what she likes. Anything to keep her away from me, anything for some peace and quiet, I'd say. Mother smiled at me mischievously, and released a glob of mucus.

One night—it was several days later—I sneaked home to take care of things and could not resist going into Mother's bedroom again. I sat on the red sofa next to the window. I had always sat there while Mother leaned on the bed frame, trying to keep me there chatting with her. But I was always in a rush—rushing to work, rushing to class, rushing to finish a story, rushing to get together with friends, rushing to see a movie, rushing to this and that. Now sitting in Mother's bedroom, her image kept floating before my eyes. Mother in a black brocade cheongsam with the wide sleeves loosely hanging, the deeply cut hem of the gown flapping round her legs, a white silk scarf draped over her shoulders, and a pair of spectacles perched on her nose. With one foot slightly lifted, she smiled teasingly as if about to go, yet her foot still lingered. Wearing a black fox-fur-lined cloak, bangs over her forehead Mother was walking through the two stone pillars, into the house, straight into the big dressing mirror on the stairway. On the wharf of the Yangtze River, the memorial arch completely covered with white flowers, a banner hung on the top of the tower with Grandpa's calligraphy "The Return of the Soul." Mother wearing white mourning clothes, lying in a dead faint by Father's coffin. Mother in grey cotton shoes and dress, lash in hand as she chased her first born son Hanchong around the house, and collapsing in grief in front of Father's portrait.

An emergency call from the hospital: Mother's condition is critical.

I rushed to hospital. The doctor was trying to save Mother. A tube was inserted down her throat.

Mother saw me and gestured for me. I held her hand tightly with my own hands. The doctor was trying to suck out mucus through the tube. Mother's face was twisted in pain as she tried to breathe. My hands tightened their grip while Mother's hand gradually loosened, as her breathing got fainter and fainter.

Mother's hand finally let go.
It was November 15, 1962.

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Chance

by Paul Engle

Taiwan, April, 1963

By simply standing silent and unmoving behind me, Hualing seemed to use up more energy than most people do when walking fast. All of her intensity burned in her accusing eyes as she finally spoke, "You didn't even talk to me. That was rude."

I stared back for a moment and then said with as much bitterness as I could call up from the deep of my throat, "You came so late I didn't even know you were here. That was rude."

We glared at each other. I could feel the tension in her small, lovely, straight, independence-asserting body. Finally I told her, in what I can now see must have been the sort of mean tone a father uses toward his child who has been naughty, "I can't talk to you now. I have to go to the dinner."

Hualing's sniff was hard as iron dropped on my ear. "I'm invited to dinner too. I can't stay and talk with you.

More glaring. Then a little smiling. Then I asked, and looking back I think that was really rude, "Where are you going for dinner?"

She was startled at the directness of such a question from a stranger. She half turned away, as if to leave, then turned back and said, "With a friend. At a restaurant." She said, with a sharp smile. "The food will be very good. Real Chinese."

Everyone was leaving the reception. We both realized in the same instant that it would be embarrassing if we were left alone staring at each other in that big room. In the same breath we both said, "We'd better go. Sorry."

At the door I put out my hand. She did not take it. I looked steadily at her face for answers: She liked me a little. She loathed me a lot. She found me interesting, but she also found her own pride powerful. I stumbled my way into a stupid sentence. "I'm very busy tomorrow, people to see, but maybe we could meet for a quick minute somewhere."

She looked at me carefully, the way one regards a strange animal in a zoo seen for the first time. Then again that firm, quick voice, "I'm busy too. I have children to get to school. I teach at a University. I write. All of my days are full."

I'm not too bright, but I am alert enough to know when I have just been hit by a brick, even if it is softened with a four thousand year tradition of courtesy to foreigners and lacquered with a twentieth century gloss. I was stunned by this little, tough, impressive creature. It was as if a fragment of the Great Wall of China had sneaked down a valley and given some helpful American advice, "Look, Mac, cool it. The lady's not overwhelmed. You blew it. Get a cab. Scram. On your way. No use to stay."

I floated my reply in the solid air between us. "Then I will help you get a cab. I'll take you."

"Thank you very much," her voice softening a little, then hardening a little as she dropped her beautiful individuality in my eager ears, "I can get there on my own." She walked away down the street, her graceful,

straight back telling me in Chinese, "Don't follow."

"But tomorrow," I yelled, louder than needed for the short distance between. She walked faster. Disappeared.

I was greeted at the door by the host, who told me with the self-assurance of a person in any country of the world who believes that he has just committed a kind and thoughtful act, "You have been seated next to Nieh Hualing, because she knows English so well."

As I pulled out my chair, Hualing looked up at me without smiling. She nodded her head. I made a slight and ridiculous bow and sat down. We did not speak. I glanced at the strange food. As a native of a country when trapped next to an ignorant foreigner, she began to name the dishes on the oval table surrounded with literary men and women. Then she added, "It's terrible not to know what you are eating," her voice full of admiration for the dishes and of a sudden tolerance for me. We both realized in the same quick moment that it was a ridiculous situation and that it would be a long evening. Eating (especially Chinese) brings people together. We smiled.

As the dishes circulated faster, so did my blood. In spite of our grim confrontation an hour before, I quickly discovered that Hualing's true nature was warm, nourishing and attractive as the food.

"I really didn't know you were standing behind me," I told her, "but I felt some gentle vibrations coming from a woman. They weren't a man's vibrations, thank God."

"Then why didn't you turn around?"

"Because I was shaking hands with a stranger from the American Embassy. He was describing my schedule. Every hour. But I'm not an official," I added. "I'm just a writer here to meet writers."

"Good. I don't like officials, American or Chinese. I don't even like all writers."

I looked her straight in the eyes and asked, "Will you try to like me?" It was a bold remark to speak to a Chinese woman, but I've always been blunt (and suffered for it).

Hualing looked at me, smiling with those steady, bright eyes. "It wouldn't be easy."

"Easy things aren't worth doing," I whispered. "You could always try to forget our first meeting and hope for a better one."

"I could hope. I could try, but will I? We may never see each other again. Maybe that would be good."

"Maybe for you. Not for me," I replied, trying to be happily flippant in that dreadful Engle manner which usually offends.

Hualing's lively glance went through my eyes. I could feel it in the back of my head.

The room was loud with fast Chinese talk, save for Hualing and I mumbling softly in English, trying not to be overheard, trying to be unnoticed. It didn't work. Soon guests were watching us, while still chanting (it seemed like that) their own rapid tones. We both began to concentrate on eating. Hualing kept her eyes toward the always-changing foods on her plate (lucky plate!). In desperation I said softly, without turning to her, "It will be late and dark when we leave. You shouldn't be alone. May I get a cab and drop you at your house?"

She did not speak nor turned toward me. Silence slipped in between us like a third person. I found myself chewing the same mouthful for several minutes. Finally, saying nothing, continuing to pass dishes to me, she nodded her head without uttering a word. No one who had not heard my question would know what she meant.

The rest of the dinner was a blur. I have a photograph someone took of me picking up, for the first time in my life, a slippery pigeon's egg with chopsticks. My grin of triumph is the stupidest I have ever recorded. Several of the guests were looking at me. Hualing was laughing. I remember no one else at the dinner except the lively lady who was so kind and wise as to invite me. She changed my life, every day from 1963 to now, for each day involved either the memory of Hualing or her presence. I have never eaten a pigeon egg since. One was enough to do the trick. Now when I see pigeons swarming over a barnyard in Iowa or flying across railroad tracks searching for spilled grain, or walking stiffly along the gutters of cities, or taking off in flight, gracefully beating their iridescent wings, I give them my silent gratitude for helping me make Hualing laugh, and later walk out to a taxi.

As we got in the cab she said, "You really shouldn't. I don't live very far."

"Let's go," I told her. "Tell the driver."

We went a block along the main street and turned down a narrow lane, stopping after half a block.

"But this is absurd," I muttered, "We can't stop. And we can't just sit here. And I refuse to go to my hotel after being with you three minutes."

There was a flutter at the door of the little house where she lived. An old woman appeared, certainly her amah for the two daughters I knew Hualing had. She had been waiting to be sure their mother came home safely. When she saw a strange foreign man in the cab she jerked inside and slammed the door.

"Just tell the driver to go on." I said.

"But where?"

"Anywhere. Just so we keep moving. Out to that big boulevard. Anywhere."

She spoke. The cab moved. And I was moved. She was doing what I had asked. Full of uncertainty and good food, we rode along the still crowded Taipei streets.

"You are very good to do this for me," I said.

"I'm not good. I'm just curious."

"So am I, and this is the most curious taxi ride I've ever taken. And the best." I do not remember one building, one street corner, one park we passed that night. I watched only Hualing, who sat staring, as far as I could tell, not at me and not at the city but at the back of the driver's neck. In repose, her round but slender body gave off enough energy to move the taxi.

Every few minutes she would say, "Maybe I should go home now," and I would respond, "A little farther." A great French poet, Baudelaire, once wrote that it is not important to arrive, but only to depart, to go away.

Taipei is not an attractive city. For me, there was only one thing in it worth looking at, and she was next to me, radiating curiosity and sly humor. "I feel like a child who has to go where it is told to go, but doesn't have any idea where or why." Her voice was firm, amused and impatient as she told me, "I have to get up in the morning and dress children, feed them, take them to school. You only have to get up and eat breakfast."

We drove on until the driver stopped, looked back at us and told Hualing, "I never took people without going some place. It's crazy. I want to go back now."

Hualing told him "Yes" and in a few minutes we turned into her little lane.

I said, "Only three days left for me here. Will you have breakfast, lunch and dinner with me every day?"

"No. Not breakfast," she answered. "Maybe lunch. Tomorrow."

"And dinner," I urged. "And next day lunch and dinner, and third day lunch and dinner."

"Only lunch tomorrow."

She moved toward the door as I moved toward her. "Wait," I said. "It's a dark lane. I'll take you to the door."

Going up the walk, I took her hand. Stopping at the house door, I pulled her closer and without asking, before she could say NO, I kissed her until she pushed away.

"Where for lunch tomorrow?" I asked.

"Hotel lobby. Good night." I hardly saw the door open as she slipped inside.

Early next morning I canceled my lunch date. After a fast second of uncertainty, I also canceled dinner--Engle nature, always hoping for and expecting the best. And often, by luck or virtuous nature, getting it. As in Taipei.

In the morning, Taiwan writers whom I had brought to the Writers Workshop at the University of Iowa (which I directed for twenty five years and was still directing when I was on this Asian trip) came to talk at the hotel. We talked about Kenny's beer tavern, where writers congregated, of any nationality, to talk about their own new books, mostly poetry ("How much truth can a blade of grass bear?" wrote one, proving that Walt Whitman did in fact have a Chinese son). A few brought wives and little kids, frightened as much of the American friend of their father as of the hustle of the crowded streets, the danger of the traffic so new to them and to Taipei itself. It was wonderful to find the old friendships alive and warm and happy to see their old guru from Iowa eating noodles. Yet each hour was a small wall separating that morning from Hualing's arrival at the hotel lobby. "How are Munchie and Sara?" one asked about my daughters, whom they all knew from many times in our house. "They are pretty girls. Watch out for boys!"

At last they left as noon arrived. Hualing was at the reception desk, surely asking my room number to call. I walked up behind her and waited.

As she turned away and saw me, I said, "You're very rude. You didn't speak to me. Are you hungry?"

"You're very rude to sneak up behind me. And I'm hungry."

She was wearing that flattering Chinese dress, qipao, tight at the waist, collar hugging the neck, slit on the sides, not long but below the knees.

At lunch I learned about Hualing's translations from the English of Hemingway, Willa Cather, Henry James (how can the Chinese language adapt those subtleties, shy implications?), Walter Van Tilburg Clark (how could she grasp the American West of which he writes?), William Faulkner.

"How could you fit those long, convoluted sentences of the South into your own language?" I asked.

"Don't you know," she quickly said, "China has provinces in the South too." It was obvious I would never

catch up with her. I watched as she handled chopsticks as deftly as she walked, as she laughed, as she gestured. She was like a watch--every delicate piece worked, just like her mind, which I could not see, but could feel it floating in the air between us.

Hualing took charge, suggesting dishes. Once when I asked about a certain food she told me, "Don't order it now. Or ever!"

The meal was delicious, flavors I had never experienced before, and so was the talk. She told me about a man I had hoped to see, a former high official in the government of Chiang Kai-shek, the Nationalist Party which moved to Taiwan in 1949 and took over the regime, who was in prison. His crimes? Advocating free elections and other political parties. Ten years of prison. I was learning.

Hualing suddenly told me, "I must go back to the University."

"You are a worker," I said. "You support your mother, two daughters, yourself and the amah and you don't complain."

"What good is complaining?"

"But you also write your own fiction, you translate American literature, you publish in magazines, you publish books, you teach at two Universities. I don't know any other woman who would do all of that, especially without a husband at home. Why would any man stay away from you for years?"

"We've been separated six years. I'm happier without him. Now I must absolutely leave here."

"And dinner tonight? Where?"

"Are you so sure I'll come?"

I took both her hands. "Of course. If you don't, I'll be miserable, and maybe you will be too."

She rose and walked toward the door, saying softly, "Hotel lobby, seven o'clock. We'll go to a different restaurant."

"Good. I want to try Sichuan cooking this time. I hope you'll be hungry for it. And maybe a tiny bit hungry to see me." The usual slippery Engle arrogance.

Hualing smiled as she left. I could hear her rapid heels clicking on the marble floor, faster than the walk of any woman I knew. Only one thought in my surprised head--I'd like to hear those small feet the rest of my life.

And I have been blessed to hear them the rest of my life.

I forget the food, save that it was hot Sichuan, and the talk, except that my first remark was, "Would you come to Iowa?" Americans had told her about the Writers Workshop. It was set up for young American students of talent, but when I became Director I at once began inviting foreign writers, from Hong Kong, Taiwan, India, Sweden, England, Philippines, others.

"Why should I?" she asked. "I think NO."

"Because you are a writer, a good one, I have read your stories in English translation."

A long and attractive silence. Then a reply: "Impossible."

"Why?"

"I may not be able to get the exit permit from the government. I was an editor of the magazine that advocated democracy and criticized Chiang Kai-shek's government. Four people, including the publisher, are in prison."

A long dinner, warming the stomach and the head. At the end I asked again, "Will you come to Iowa if invited?"

"I'm not sure. Now I must go back to the children. Good night."

"Lunch tomorrow? Dinner tomorrow?"

"Yes."

My last night we had dinner with about fifteen writers, which meant that I sat at one end of a long table and Hualing had to sit at the far end. Bad luck. The restaurant was outdoors near the bank of the Dan-shui River, which flows through Taipei and north of the sea. We had a Mongolian barbecue--a big iron dome with a fire inside and many holes punched in it. Thin pieces of tender beef were tossed on the iron, cooked quickly, turned over, eaten quickly. There was a full moon. It didn't seem to shine as much as to glow on the River, on us, on the glowing iron cooker.

Next day we met at the airport. An official of the Airport Security personally escorted me from the gate to the plane. Why? Because he was also a poet and wanted his first chance to show honor to an American poet.

As we passed Hualing, standing with other writers on the other side of the heavy fence, I asked quickly, "Iowa?"

Her face looked at me, shy, warm, determined. I put my right hand through an opening in the mesh.

Soft and strong, her fingers took it. Wary of all the other people around her seeing me off, her voice soft and strong, her eyes alive with daylight and, I hoped, the hope of seeing me in that faraway State of Iowa, she said, "I'm not sure."

Hualing came to the Iowa Writers Workshop in 1964.

*

PART THREE: THE DEER GARDEN, IOWA (1964 – 1991)

Holding You by the Hand

A Bouquet of Letters

Paris
March 31, 1966

Darling Hualing:

Your dear letter was waiting for me at the hotel when I arrived. I was very tired after only two hours sleep and it cheered me up immensely. What a terrible devotion you have, so much that it frightens me into worrying about the possibility that you receive too little in return, although you have all of mine. It is desolate being without you, although I meet many people and some of them interesting, a few fascinating.

It is so trite to say, but this is really a beautiful city, not overwhelming, but charming and full of small lovely scenes. My hotel is tiny, under a great church whose bells toll the hours. Old ladies run it and I must speak French with them, which is very good for me although rough on them, since I have forgotten most of what little I knew, although I can get by with practical details. I hope to learn fast and will take lessons. I am seeing writers for the short story project, but have found that few stories are written because the pay is so very low--they all expand ideas into short novels. Actually, poetry seems to be more important now than fiction. Alas, it is Easter holidays and many are leaving the city.

Trees are in bloom here, it is quite warm, and there are flowers beginning. Grass is green, all much ahead of Iowa City. Monday I see people about bringing French writers to Iowa and Tuesday I see people who know about short story writers, and so it goes. In between I intend to meet poets. (This is a funny typewriter and I make mistakes.)

Many strikes here; no mail is delivered or goes out, so this will be slow arriving. Your letter came in only FOUR days a miracle.

Now I have an empty evening and that makes me feel more deeply about how much I miss you. I should stay in my queer little room and write, and perhaps I will do so, going to bed early like a decent citizen, but it is damn lonely that way. Still, I am tired from the flight and the sleeplessness, so will probably have just such a dull evening.

How different it is for us because I came back to Iowa instead of going to Paris in December. The whole year has been fantastic; the one really good part of it was being with you--how many times, how many places.

This is the first letter I have written.

Love, Paul

~

Paris
April 5, 1966

Darling:

Forgive me for not writing oftener. Aside from the exhaustion of the first days after the trip (you lose six hours coming this way), I have worked hard at my job of seeing people who can help me find stories for LIFE, which means going all around Paris, talking, making appointment, etc. I have been to one of the ancient and really beautiful houses on the "Ile Saint Louis," which has on it the

great Notre Dame cathedral, and up endless worn stairs to a tiny one room apartment with a bed on an alcove above, reached by a ladder, no bathroom (the nearest toilet is across a courtyard at ground level, and is French-miserable), but it is interesting and I only wish I had a proper amount of time for all of the people and places I see and will see.

I do miss you terribly, and especially when I come back to my dingy and lonely room each night and crawl sadly into bed. It is also true that I miss you when I see something really fine and can't share it with you, such as Notre Dame floodlight at night, the tall flying buttresses throwing supple shadows on the walls and windows, something which the people who built it never saw. At such times, I curse the seventeen years too many, sitting like a monkey on my back, which make whatever barrier there is between you and me. Who knows--one day you may visit Paris with me, but that is an idle speculation. Anyway, so many of the places, people and things would be more fun if I could share them with you.

There has been a mail strike here for days, so that I have had no letter from you since that first one, which arrived the same moment I did. Maybe you haven't written, but I hope that perhaps tomorrow there will be one, to let me know that you still recall as vividly as I those funny foolish drives around Iowa City and the hours in the country, like the afternoon when you would not see any people and I had to go alone to the Bourjaily party and then pick you up later. When I get back, I will put a trailer on a hill, and you can visit me for dinner!

Now I must go (I have not left my room this morning because I want to send you my love before I did anything else today). By now you will know that I have changed my address and have moved to a better hotel, more convenient. One which I wish I could share with you.

Love, Paul

~

Paris
April 7, 1966

Dearest Hualing:

I am most worried at having had only one letter from you since I arrived almost ten days ago. You must always let me know if something is wrong. I am certain that you have written me more than that one letter. At least always do send the briefest note so that I know you are well and the girls are OK. By now you should have had my new address, but here it is again--

H:otel de la Paix, 225 Boulevard Raspail, Paris 14e

This afternoon I drive out to the farthest west point of France, Brittany, for the Easter weekend and will go to Catholic Mass on Easter Sunday at a little fishing village church. The people are the oldest in France and were originally Celtic, not French, related to the Welsh, and still speak an old language. Many pre-historic remains are there, and the great Cathedral of Mont St. Michel, rising out of the sea. Back on Tuesday to resume my endless trips around Paris seeing writers and trying to locate short stories for LIFE. It is frustrating work, and I wish I were off somewhere with you writing my own things. Indeed, one reason I will be glad to have this trip end is in order to write my own stuff at last, so much I want to do. I have also been trying to find ways of bringing young French writers over to Iowa, but so far no luck at all. That is discouraging too, and makes me feel that I am wasting really valuable time.

The day is rainy and full of gloom, miserable for starting out on an auto trip. French drivers are the worst in the world, madmen behind the wheel, cutting in you from left and right and killing each other at a higher rate than the USA. I dread the traffic on this trip, but will be so glad to be out on the sandy beaches. Each day I will write a little on a long poem I have begun, and that will be a comfort.

I miss you each time I come back to my room, and each time I think of you it is with such live

warmth I can seem to touch you.

Love, Paul

~

Hotel Montgomery
Mont Saint Michel, France
Easter Sunday, 1966

Darling:

In the excitement of new places and travel and different people, I could go along alone, but out on this beautiful and wild peninsula, I miss you terribly. The landscape reminds me of the endless times we went out to the country to be with each other, and I wish you could be here sharing all this with me. It seems like eternity until I see you again. The happiest day of the trip will be heading home.

Love to you and the girls, Paul

Along the ocean today. Paris tomorrow.

~

Paris
April 13, 1966

Dearest Hualing:

I came back to Paris and found not only one letter at Hotel Recamier, but two here, a great joy, and very cheering for me. I drove the car all the way from Brittany to Paris, a curious experience, because French drivers are the worst in the world, none of them experienced and all of them driving wildly from side to side. There were palm trees and flowers all across Brittany and Spring is early there. Tonight I am staying in my room to write you and answer all letters received.

Your letters touch me very deeply, and I can only assure you that I resent and regret this separation also. What fun it would be for me to have you here, to take you up in the Eiffel Tower and show you endless miles of Paris, to take you to restaurants and order food such as you have never had, to eat at the Chinese restaurant, and to show you La Sainte Chapelle, my favorite, beautiful building in Paris, a miniature "Holy Chapel" near the Seine, and to give you the awful experience of listening to my bad French. I learn, but so slowly. What a joy it would be for both of us to share this lovely city, the most attractive in the world. I'm torn, you know, between wanting to be here and feeling lucky to have this trip across Europe, and wishing that I could be with you. One day, perhaps, you can come with me. Meanwhile, I go about my duties for LIFE, meet writers, find stories, and hope to get done the job which I was asked to do. The hotel here is an odd one, very clean (unusual in Paris!) fairly quiet, close to Boulevard Montparnasse, and a good place for me to work. There is one good thing about being alone like this--I do not drink as much as I did in Iowa City, almost entirely wine, and that keeps me feeling better. But the nights are impossibly lonesome, when I want you beside me, as close as people can get. Will we really be that way again?

In a day or so I am writing a long account of my trip thus far to send in carbon copies to my sisters and brother and Sara, and will ask a copy to be sent to you so that you can have in more detail where I have been and what I have done.

I thought Nelson Algren's card was very amusing. I'll miss him when he goes, but I doubt that he will miss Iowa City. There is something curiously gently about him, in spite of his need to act tough.

Now I must answer business letters, so that I will be free tomorrow to see people and do my duties. It is so dreary going to this room and staring at the wall, the typewriter and my mess of books

and papers. Still, I wanted to come and I'm glad to be here, knowing that I'll be back in Iowa before ten weeks. Then I will have a tremendous amount of writing to do rather quickly. But I will have a tremendous amount of being with you, as well.

All love to you, Paul

~

Paris
April 15, 1966

Darling:

Two days now without a letter from you and I feel very desolated. I know you have much to do and you have been most faithful.

Your letter touches me deeply. As for barriers between us, there are certainly none. It astonishes me each time I see you how easy it is for us to be together, now there doesn't even seem to be thin air between us! My anxiety is the old one--time, age, years, the fear of becoming inactive when you are still lively and eager and lovely. Selfishly, I could marry you and have the joy of being with you, but what joy for you in ten years when the rest of thinning hair is either gray or gone? That worries me, and causes me to think about the injustice of my cutting you off from life. Only this.

I worry about your not sleeping, for I know how depressing that can be. The first week in Paris I did not sleep, and went through the days in a trance. Now I am better. Dearest Hualing, you know how much I want to take you with me wherever I go, and be with you in Iowa. Some nights this trip I am so exhausted I almost shake, and it is at such times that I believe it would be wrong for me to ask you to live with this creaking hulk which I am becoming. Yet already I plan for you--I must be some days in Chicago this autumn to write an article about the city for a magazine, and you must go with me. Until then, I love you as no other,

Paul

Just received your lovely letter. Will go to Chicago November 4 to speak. Hope you can join me--maybe the girls could also go and we could have weekend together there.

~

Paris
April 16, 1966

Darling:

I mailed a letter to you about an hour ago, and now comes yours. I am so happy to have the Lake MacBride photos of you and the girls, and have already shown them to a friend.

Now I have spent all morning writing you, except for a visit from Thu Van.¹ As usual, her affairs are in a mess. She needs to get a visa for the USA as her other one has expired, but she can't show financial solvency. I will have to take her passport to the American Embassy Monday (today is Saturday) and spend some hours trying to get her a legal visa for re-entry so taht she can work on her

¹ A student from Vietnam.

manuscript in Iowa. It seems to me that a lot of my time is wasted helping people because of their own inefficiency.

You don't seem too far away now--your letter was dated April 14 and it reached me here April 16, which is fantastically fast. As for returning direct to Iowa, that is probably impossible, as I will need to be in New York a couple of days to consult about my work. However, I have decided not to go to Washington on arrival, as the State Department has asked, but to put that off until much later. Then I may also skip New York. By taking a plane across the Atlantic in the morning, I could arrive in New York late afternoon, and go out at once to Chicago and then Cedar Rapids, but I would be dead tired. But now that you have suggested it, perhaps I ought to skip New York, where I have no interest in being, and rush straight home to get my summer started and my work underway and not visit New York until autumn, after I have done my articles and have completed my LIFE project with the short stories from various countries. In fact, right now, the thought of going all the way to Iowa from Ireland, and having you and Sara meet me with the white truck, is very attractive. As of this minute, that is what I'll do.

Much love, Paul

~

Paris
April 18, 1966

Darling:

No letter from you today! Only business, Universtiy and other, most of it discouraging. I was turned down by two places on which I had counted for money to give writers in the coming years. If I weren't a person given to hope and cheerfulness, I'd be very discouraged. In fact, yesterday I was gloomy all day. It was raining, the work I am doing for LIFE goes poorly, I get sick of returning to this unlovely hotel room alone each night, I had a minor sickness with my belly so that I couldn't eat, and I haven't done any writing since I left home. But I do have one optimistic idea.

I am sure that PEN will invite you to the New York meetings June 12-18, and you should really go. With your trip paid for, why don't you stay on, perhaps with your friends, and consult the Comlumbia University materials, until I come back, which would mean staying on only 6-7 days longer. Then you could meet my plane if you wishes, once more, and we could have a couple of days together, and travel home together. Do consider this seriously. I am willing not to stop off in New York on my way home, unless you are there to meet me. Could you leave the girls that long, two weeks?

I have decided not to attend PEN meetings even if offered a free trip, as I want all the time here I can manage. As it is, I am having trouble getting into Poland in May because they are celebrating the 1000 year anniversary of the founding of Poland as a Catholic country, and they don't want people to see how strong Catholicism still is there.

Last night I went to a music hall and heard French comedians, singers, dancers, really fine people. I waver between moments of great hope and belief in what I am doing, and moments of discouragement about my lack of accomplishment, reproach because I don't find my good French short stories faster, and lonesomeness for you. This last emotion is constant, however, and does not waver.

It would be simply wonderful to have you waiting for me in New York once more when I arrive from Europe. Please think seriously of this, especially since you could use the time for your writing project.

Dearest love to you, Paul

~

Paris
April 19, 1966

Darling Hualing:

Today I have your letter no. 3. There is no problem here about receiving your letters; when I leave for Poland and Germany I will be less certain. In Poland, not too bad, as I will have one mailing address in Warsaw, but in Germany I will be moving around, so will have to let mail collect at one point and get it once a week.

This morning I had just waked up and was yawning before rising when there was a tiny rustle at the door and your letter slid underneath it onto the rug, inch by inch, and I knew it was from you even before I saw your name. So heartening for me to hear from you!

Today I stay in my room working until afternoon, when I must cross Paris to a French lesson, then to an appointment with a writer, then to buy books, then back to hotel to change clothes and go out to dinner with the daughter of an old friend of mine from New York and a couple of other Americans who live here permanently. I am finding some short stories at last and feel hopeful. I made a long trip for Thu Van about her passport and found out precisely what I had told her--that only SHE can get a visa and she must appear in person. She is so demanding, and I only hope in the long run she really does write a publishable book.

Last night I had dinner with an American soldier and his wife; he is a story writer from Stanford, and she is studying Chinese, learning it from Peking Chinese who speak French! He may come to Iowa to write; she wants to take a Ph.D. in Chinese art, but I doubt that Iowa has the facilities. There was also a writer from TIME and his French girl friend. He is one of those tall, cheerful, rather innocent Americans and she is one of those sharp, shrewd, lively, attractive but not beautiful Paris women. It was fun--we went to a restaurant on the Ile St. Louis near the cathedral and had wonderful food with lots of beer, then walked along the dark river an hour, with bums sleeping under the bridges. Then we went to Les Halles and watched meat and vegetables being unloaded at the public markets, great boxes of lovely carrots and radishes, even crates of thyme, which smelt tangy in the night air. I thought of you each step and wished you could have been along. My damn heel hurt with every step, the only bad thing.

I am really taking it easier now; at first I was depressed, but now I feel more hopeful as I accomplish a little. Everything would be more fun if you were here with me. One day! Much, much love. I depend on your letters more than I should.

Paul

~

Paris
April 21, 1966

Darling:

Letter No.4 this morning, dated April 18. How fast it came--we are not really so far apart.

About Chicago--I am to write an article on taking children to the city, what to show them, where to go, what to eat, etc. We would visit museums, art and anthropological (Chicago has one of the world's best, fascinating), scientific museum, parks, high buildings, new buildings and old ones, and I would see what interested the girls most. You could keep notes for me and advise me when I was writing it, which I would do at once after the trip. We could do this for other places too, and earn money together! On that trip, I will also have to give a couple of lectures, in Milwaukee, about 50 miles north of Chicago. And about Des Moines--let me remind you that after the eight hours sleep I felt better and stronger than in years. I need that sort of life, and from you. I wish I could reach out and touch you now, so warm and soft as you are. Often I think of your dear and lovely body and I

become homesick for you. Right now.

About future trips--unless I go to Asia, it is unlikely that I will ever go away again for this long a time. In future, a month or 5 weeks will be about the most, and even that isn't probable for a year or more. Mostly I will be going to Washington, New York, San Francisco for short trips.

There are eight weeks before we meet again; they will be full ones for both of us, but harder for you, because I am distracted by many people and places and you are in the same place seeing the same people every day. Actually, I am in good health just now, sleeping well, eating carefully, drinking little but wine (at home, I drank so much because of the tension of the household, but here I don't have that, and I intend to keep it this way). When we are together, you can help me so much, I will depend on you in all the endless things we can do together. All love to you,

Paul

~

Paris

April 23, 1966

Darling:

No word from you today or yesterday, although piles of letters, all in need of answering, both days. I have spent three hours doing nothing but letters, replying to the USA on business and to Poland and Germany about my trip. I go off to Germany about May 4, and to Poland on May 21, leaving Warsaw about June 7, although I may stay until the 14, I might even get to New York for the PEN if I crowded things here, but I'm not sure I want to do that. Maybe we could have a whole week in New York.

Stamps for Lan Lan, one of them I didn't expect to find, that on the envelope, a real beauty.

Last night I had an odd experience, visiting the studio of a very famous printmaker, who runs the most distinguished school in Paris, although he is English. With him was his girl friend, who couldn't have been more than 26, while he was 64. It gave me a haunted feeling to see them together, her cheeks round and fresh, his lined and wrinkled, her hair jet black, his gray. You know what this means to me in my own case. You know clearly that there is no other woman about whom I feel as I do toward you, or whom I would consider seeing as I see you, but that awful barrier of age frightens me. When I am another ten years older, only ten, you will still be younger than I am now, full of life and passion, and I will be certainly weaker than now, if not either dead or at least some sort of semi-invalid. At the rate men have heart attacks in the USA, I can expect to have one not long after that, if not before (both my father and mother died of heart attacks, and it runs in families). What should I do, drag you and the girls down into living with a tired old man? I am sorry to sound gloomy, for none of this diminishes my very great love for you.

Now I must go to a lunch appointment, then to the most beautiful little church in the world, La Sainte Chapelle, then back to translate French and read stories for my project, then dinner with an American writer living in Paris.

All love to you,

Paul

~

April 30, 1966

Dearest Hualing:

Your letter 9 and 10 arrived together just now, the maid slipping them slowly under the door as if they were flat snakes creeping into the room. Tomorrow I am off with American friends to see the beaches where the USA troops went ashore on Normandy, and the great Bayeux tapestry, depicting historical moments. Back Monday noon for more work on my LIFE story project, and to Germany Wednesday evening.

I wish you could go everywhere here with me, such a joy to have you and so interesting for you. I am simply bored with other women! But as I said a year ago, if you had a fine man your age, I'd tell you to marry him and deprive myself of the great joy of being with you for your sake, which indicates that I do love you beyond anyone else. But let us speak no more of this until I return, which will now definitely be Sunday, June 12, when I will take a plane from Shannon for JFK at New York. To tell the truth, I'm already looking forward to that moment, being fed up with hotel life and constant motion. I look forward greatly to ending my German and Polish visits and having some days in the beautiful countryside of western Ireland in the gray quiet of those hills. Bryan MacMahon and his wife will be with me as guides and translators from the Gaelic when needed. I think you ought to be there to meet me, taking a plane which would safely get you to JFK at New York well in advance of mine. Last year, if my plane had arrived on time, we would have missed each other because yours arrived after my plane was due to land, and surely that won't happen again. It would be so much more satisfying to see you long days and nights in New York by ourselves. COME!

Last night I ate a solitary little meal in my room, typed hours, and went to bed, where the most overwhelming sense of wanting you next to me came right into the bed and I was terribly homesick for you. We have shared so much, including disasters like my leg and wonderful moments everywhere. I carry your tiny passport picture with me and look at it regularly.

This is just to send you word before I leave.

Love, love, Paul

~

Paris

May 3, 1966

Dearest Hualing:

On returning from the Normandy beaches, where I went on Sunday with two friends, I found you letter #11 about Fanny and Ralph Ellison being in Iowa City; you know how much I wish that I could share the Chinese dinner with the Algrens, Ellisons and you. How wonderful if you and I could be the hosts together! Do tell me how it was. Here is a funny photo taken up high on the Eiffel Tower--the man is a student of mine 15 years ago, and the girl is his friend, English and MUCH younger. It seems to be in style. Anyway, he is a novelist and linguist and will come to Iowa City this autumn to visit the Translation Workshop, since he is going to be at University of Texas in charge of their work in translation, for which Ford Foundation has given them \$750,000. We must get help from that fund for our translators.

By now you have my letters saying that you must come to NY and meet me on June 12. When I returned from Normandy this afternoon I had only 20 minutes before an urgent appointment, but I sent you a card while changing clothes, out of pure love for you. Sometimes I think of how dear a person you are, and I simply shake with longing to see you. But I am encouraged now, because Germany will be only two weeks, Poland only two weeks, Ireland only six days, and then I see you, and we see each other together in that marvelous isolation in New York. After my weekend in a tiny hotel directly on the sea, I am much rested and in better health than when I reached Paris. Don't worry, when I get back I will lead a healthy life outdoors and with you (also indoors!)

Beginning May 14, write me to Warsaw.

Love, love, Paul

~

Paris
May 3, 1966

Darling:

How faithful you have been--I never realized how very faithful until this trip. You have been so loyal in writing me, and probably walking to the Post Office to mail letters. Your No.12 just came, the day before I leave. Note my times for changing my address in the last letter I sent. I am frantically busy today, but must send you word before I start off to the far north of Paris to see an exiled Polish writer, then five appointments in different parts of the city in sequence. This evening I sit in my room and type up names of all the people I have seen and make a report to LIFE. France is disappointing for the story, but Poland will be great I am sure, and Germany better. Already it is exciting to think of flying out of Shannon airport in Ireland for NY as I did in November, with such tragic results in NY. I am so happy you were with me on that awful night and cared for me so tenderly when I broke my ankle. I don't see how I can live without you now. I wrote Sara to get my new car on June 18 and pick up Lan Lan and Wei Wei in it to meet us at the airport when we return on June 19. Note that I said US! I can't bear being in NY without you; I want you to be there at JFK when my plane lands, once again meet me! We can see the Ellisons and others and you'll have a good time.

I wish you were flying to Germany with me tomorrow; I'd love to show you a country which I know well; I wonder if I can still talk with the people. It is quite exciting for me to return there, to the place where I spent so much of my student time.

I loved your account of the Ellison dinner.

You must forgive me in the next weeks, as I will be traveling rapidly and can't write much--Berlin, Hanover, Margurg, Munich, Tuebingen, Nurenberg, Frankfurt, Warsaw, Cracow, Poznan, Dublin, Sligo. It wearies me to think of it! But it refreshes me to know I will see you in less than 6 weeks.

Dear, Dear Nieh Hualing, whom I love utterly.

Paul

~

Berlin, West Germany
May 5, 1966

Darling:

I have just arrived in Berlin and find it a strange, rather forbidding place compared to the old city I knew before the war destroyed it. I had the strangest, most haunted feeling on returning to a place I knew as a student, with a family which has all been destroyed save for one daughter who lives in a distant city, and her husband was lost in the war. I did not want a moment to go by without writing you, so that I have not unpacked, but only taken out my typewriter. It is reassuring that I can talk with the people, although not fluently, but enough to converse. The best part of my visit is that, although I am going farther away from the USA with each move, I feel as if I had begun the homeward trip. Even writing you gives me a feeling of closeness. Through all of the many strange ways and

places we have seen each other, we have come to a deep understanding of what the other is. Don't you feel that also? Here I have, in contrast to Paris, a huge and sunlit room with THREE beds and a wardrobe half as long as my whole room at the Hotel de la Paix. It is tiring, as you know, to do all the airport waiting, the passport business, the endless sitting, and, of course, as always happens in France. two French pushed in ahead of me, and I fel really quite cheap when, seeing this happen, I quickly put my luggage on the scales first so that they had to wait their proper turn!

This city was totally destroyed in the war, and such things survived, like a famous church, have the top half shot away. A gloom, and especially with the infamous Berlin Wall cutting across the city to keep East Germans from escaping from the communist regime.

I have all of your letters in my bag and they glow there as a witness that you do love me, as far as I can tell, without reservation. Is that true? Or do you, quite understandably, worry about things you don't tell me? We must be completely candid with each other, and I certainly feel that I have been with you. I've never deceived you in any way, by word or act. But if you do NOT come to NY June 12, maybe I will begin deceiving you! I cannot bear the thought of landing at JFK with you not there.

Of course, I have set up my little FM radio and have the Berlin good music station playing. What an ancient person of fixed habits I have become! Do not write this hotel as I am here only one night before moving to another. I think of you with great tenderness, and only wish that you could share THREE beds with me tonight. Stamps for Lan Lan; the little paper says that I have paid to use the facilities of the Paris airport. As always, French have found a way of getting money from people by charging them \$1.50 simply for entering the airport. What a sting people, how unworthy of a nation which brags about "glory."

Now I must go have dinner with a writer and his wife. Tomorrow maybe I will have a letter from you at the U. S. Mission in Berlin, where I have asked Bonn to send my mail. The Mission was kind enough to send a driver and car to meet me at the Tegel airport.

If I do this short story project for LIFE well, it will probably send me off again, to Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece, and later to Asia. Want to go with me? I don't think I could bear going without you.

Love, dear, dear woman,

Paul

~

Berlin, West Germany
May 9, 1966

Dearest Hualing:

This is the longest time I have gone without a letter from you. It is Monday, and I last heard on Thursday, just as I was leaving the Paris hotel. There must surely be a letter waiting for me in Bonn, but the people there have not sent it to me, although I am sure it will arrive tomorrow. I am so glad to have written you the day I arrived so that you did not go so long without a letter from me. Now I have a few minutes between appointments and send you reassurance that each hour I wish you could be with me, seeing the places and the people. I spent time in the East Zone, going through the famous "Wall" at Check Point Charlie. I will write about it later when I send another long and public letter, but it was very depressing.

I bought a bunch of German short story books this morning and am quickly going over them for the LIFE project, very interesting, but also difficult as I have not read German in 30 years. Still, I get

along, and understand more than I have expected. Yesterday I stayed in my room almost all day long reading and writing letters, only going out for dinner alone at a restaurant called the black fuffalo. I did NOT eat buffalo. Compared to having that good steak with you at the simple Des Moines motel, it was dull, in spite of fancier decoration and service. I will write again soon, but did not want this day to go by without sending you my deepest love.

Paul

I found a few special stamps for Lan Lan², countries in English on back.

~

Berlin
May 10, 1966

Darling:

I don't know what to say about letters; people here say it takes 3 weeks from the USA through the slow Polish mail system. I suggest you write me again after receiving this, and then in a couple of days again, but probably not after May 23. Then to Buswell's Hotel, Molesworth St., Dublin, Ireland. Do not use the Sligo address unless it is an emergency and needs cable or telephone call, since it is far remote and mail would be impossible.

Wei Wei's³ letter was really very good and I will send her another card when I can get a good one. I loved the photo in your room with all those novelists. Isn't Fanny Ellison nice? Algren Nelson's face is so amusing and it is very dear of you..

Mary has not written me one word, although Sara writes, for her, often, always about horse diseases, the foals to be born, bridles, etc. She will take the girls riding one day. Your letters 16 and 17 just came. New York will be marvelous, marvelous for us.

Paul

~

Berlin
May 11, 1966

Darling:

Your letters 14 and 15 came, so relieved to have them. This is my day to sit in my room, read German stories, type letters and organize my endless notes, names, etc. It has rained for 3 days and that I like since this is a gloomy city and I remember it raining when I visited in the winters of 1934-35. Yesterday I drove along the street where I once stayed and found the old house; very homesick for the fine people, now dead, who took me in.

The days go fast toward the trip's end; much as I am glad to be here, listening to the old, familiar language and seeing places where I spent many weeks of my youth, I will be happy to leave Germany for Poland, and even happier to leave Poland for Ireland, and Ireland for NY and you. I simply

² Hualing's 15-year-old daughter.

³ Hualing's 16-year-old daughter.

want to curl around you quietly.

Love, love,

Paul

~

Berlin

May 13, 1966

Dearest Hualing:

I arrive in New York at Kennedy Airport on June 12 via Trans World Airlines flight 877 from Shannon at 1:50PM. I believe TWA has its own building. Anyway, this is the same flight I was on before and I hope it arrives on time. You are at once to go to Meacham Travel Service and order your own flights to NY (with an "open" return ticket; we will make reservations in NY). This may be asking you to get into NY too early for convenience, as it may mean quite an early plane out of Cedar Rapids (the plane from Iowa City leaves too late for a Chicago connection which would get you into NY in time). Of course, I will have to go through customs and passport, and will probably not be finished until about 2:30PM. Do try to be there by then. If you can't arrive that early, I will wait for you, but you must in any case send me your flight number and arrival time to Warsaw, repeating the information to Dublin. I am so happy to tell you this far ahead. It makes me feel far closer to you suddenly.

Sunday I begin a week of daily short trips first flying from here to Nuremberg, then train to Heidelberg, train to Tuebingen, train to Munich, plane to Frankfurt from Munich, plane from Frankfurt to Warsaw. I have my reservations to London on British European Airways, continuing to Dublin, on June 6. I may at the last minute decide to take two days in London to see friends, but I am not certain. Anyway, count on my being in Dublin June 6.

Last night I lectured in the student village of the Free University of Berlin, very pleasant, and tonight I go with a student and his girlfriend to see a musical play THE THREE PENNY OPERA in East Berlin. It is very warm here with endless flowers and it makes me wish to be in Iowa at this lovely time of the year. Never again will I travel in the good months for being outdoors, but only in winter when one might as well be in hotels as home. Maybe I can take you to London, Oxford, Paris, Munich, Rome next year! If my trip is successful for stories, LIFE may send me off again.

Here is a card for Wei Wei.

Love, love to you, Paul

~

Nuremberg

May 17, 1966

Darling:

Somehow it is easier when I travel all of the time, as I will be doing from now until NY. My days are so full of ordinary details of luggage, trains, airport, schedules, meals, meetings, I don't realize how much I miss you. Nuremberg is a city of the 15 and 16 centuries and restored (after terrible war damage) in the old style, very handsome and impressive. I lectured at a university 15 miles out of the city--Erlangen--and then came here last night, where the university sits on an imposing hill looking west toward the Rhine. Then I speak at noon today, and take a train to Tuebingen south of Stuttgart, where I see a German friend last visited in 1935, and also speak, Munich for two days, where I intend to

rent a car and drive east to the Chiem See to look for an old peasant family with whom I used to stay. Then Marburg, to visit the daughter of my dearest German friend, Franz Pauli, long dead. Her husband disappeared in the war and she had to raise 3 kids along. I leave for Warsaw May 22, eagerly, for it means the last of my duties.

No mail from you in four days, but I hope for some in Munich, to which the Embassy is supposed to send letters addressed in its care. It is the longest time I have gone without word from you! The weather is boiling hot here, and my wool clothes are awful. It means Iowa is full of green, and the wildflowers are blooming in the woods. I hate being in cities during good weather and will never do another trip save in darkest winter.

Are you really going to take driving lessons? I can believe that Wei Wei and Lan Lan can learn quickly, but are you to be trusted with powerful machinery? Maybe we can go out to Vance Bourjaily's and drive on his lane in the fields where there are no other cars and thus the most you hit will be dirt or a tree or a fence. But of course you should know how--when will you start lessons?

I will write a long letter about Germany if I can before leaving. Must stop as people are calling for me. The ancient University here is handsome and it is wrong you are not here to see it with me. It is wrong, you are not going to Poland with me, too, and doing everything else with me. How much fun we have had. I remember each detail of you, the little round places, the dear curves and the warmth of it all, and with such tenderness. Dearest Hualing, we will be together in less than a month now, and for a whole week. I love to travel with you, so that we can go home together in joy.

Love, Paul

~

Tuebingen, Germany
May 18, 1966

Dearest Hualing:

Two letters, 18 and 19, were waiting for me here when I arrived an hour ago from Heidelberg. I sent you a letter today, but I must now reply to yours.

Name of man to manage Texas Translation Center is Keith Botsford, novelist, literary type, linguist.

SEA DIARY is not one of Nelson Algren's good books; much of it I don't like at all. He should stick to fiction and leave reminiscence and criticism alone.

I wrote you within an hour of reaching Paris, within an hour of reaching Berlin, and now within an hour of coming to Tuebingen. This is a lovely university town, very old, a river splitting it in two parts and tonight there were many little boats with students and their girls rowing on the water. Several larger boats had boys and girls in wide seats drinking beer while one at the end pushed the boat ahead with a long pole.

About your question--WHAT SHALL WE DO? If I had an easy answer, I would long ago have told you. It would be so pleasant for me to say--let us marry at once the end of this summer. How pleasant for me to live with you and the girls (you know how much I care for them, and how responsible I feel for them, how I would enjoy teaching them to ride, to drive, to live in the country, and how I enjoy buying things for them--we must find presents in NY). But would it really honest of me, to ask you to take the chance of being left alone? I would, of course, try to protect you as much as I could, but is this enough? Sometimes I feel that it was a disaster for you to meet me, for perhaps it has kept you from meeting other and much younger men who would marry you with more security than I can offer. Don't you feel that way sometimes? Really and deeply feel that way? I fear that I have prevented you from being with other men in Iowa City. And yet we do have a marvelous understanding, and so very little differences between us. I am not interested in other women that way, as surely you know, and only yearn for the day when we meet first after this trip. We must

decide this summer and will discuss it together--little can be done by letter, except to reassure you that I have loved you very much for a long time, and that I have been deeply involved in your life , including the girls, that I don't see how I can reject that commitment. All of my plans lately include you and the girls, and are, often, made because of you. Without you, I would certainly not come back for PEN in NY, or care about returning to Iowa City. It would be so lovely to land in Cedar Rapids and have Sara, Lan Lan and Wei Wei lined up waiting for us with the new car.

Masses of mail waiting for me here and I must answer it now. One letter was from a Foundation giving the Writing Program \$5000 each year! Only 25 days until we meet. Love till then,

Paul

~

Munich (which the Germans spell Muenchen; it is an old word for "monks")
May 19, 1966

Darling:

Here in the rain, where I spent much time on student vacations 1934-35 , to drive out of the city and look for the old peasant family with whom I lived. Tomorrow I have appointments with the Goethe Institute to discuss ways for bringing young German writers to Iowa, and on Saturday, May 21, off to Frankfurt. This damn constant travel is miserable, but I had a good time yesterday in Tuebingen writing letters, giving a lecture to students on the Iowa Writing Program, and seeing old friends. And reading the two letters from you, above all. Sometimes I wonder if anyone in the world knows you as well as I do, in all ways, as much of your past, your problems, your hopes, the many ways you look and feel, as I do. Sometimes, also, I will suddenly think of you in the midst of conversation, or a lecture, or on a plane or train or walking on the street, and the sense of your presence is so quick and lovely and warm I simply want to stop and hold you close. Already, as these days move so swiftly, I feel that I am really on my way to you.

Hotel Schottenhamel, the hotel's name, in English is "Scotch Sheep." Already I can read newspapers and listen to people speaking with much more understanding. I am outraged here, as I was in France, at being deprived of the chance to live in the country as long as planned, and yet had that happened, you and I would not be as close as we are. It may be that, in those funny Iowa City months, what had been genuine affection for each other turned into deeper love. Is it so? So that what was lost by the damn ankle was also a gain, and I do not reproach circumstance for my being deprived on France and Germany and their languages. It may be that, since I had one semester of leave with pay, and took the other on my own without pay, but actually was in Iowa City all of September, half of October, half of December, all of January, February and most of March, and worked for the Program all that time, that I can get another semester off in two years and you can come with me. If the University won't give me that, then perhaps I can find way of being paid an equal amount by LIFE and we can go on our own. Let us try--it would be wonderful to show you Europe, and all of my friends, including the English ones who are so close and go back so far, to 19334. I doubt that I will ever do this alone again. It is so lonesome.

Now I must go eat a bit and get a car and drive away. Will send the girls cards tomorrow when I can get to the museums. Just now, what I want to get to is not museums, but Hualing, the woman I love,

Paul

~

Frankfurt
May 22, 1966

Darling:

I leave for Poland in ten minutes and type this standing at a counter watching the clock. Only one thing can be said as I go off for the last hard two weeks of this trip--other women seem so DULL to me when I think of you. Whether it is good or tragic for you to have met me, I do not know, but for me it has been lovely and strong and authentic beyond anything I could have hoped, even including the jokes we have together. The Germans have a saying--*Dass ist doch kein Spass*, which means, "That is not joke." I feel that way about us. I yearn for the moment when we meet. In terrible haste, and in full love,

Paul

*

The Man from the Cornfields

Telling Stories

Paul Engle was a good story teller. He described an event or a person with a storyteller's sense of details and twists and a wicked sense of humor. I learned a great deal about his life and personality from the endless stories he told me.

Paul used to say: "I probably shoveled more horse manure than any other American writer." Paul's father first worked with carriage horses, breaking and training them, and then taking a railroad car of them to New York City where he demonstrated their style on the Harlem Speedway, now a paved many-lane road of speeding cars.

The Engle family lived in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Each morning at 6:00 Paul rode a bicycle to the barn and harnessed two horses to two telephone company wagons hung with ladders, coils of wire, lead-melting pots, clips for climbing poles, and cutters. He had to drive one horse with his left hand and lead the other with his right. There were ten railroad tracks to cross, and if an engine came close and whistled that high steam sound, one horse reared one way; the second, another. Paul was more terrified of what his father would do if he let go of the horses than of the startled animals, so he hung on, yelling in imitation of his father's authoritarian voice. Then he would tie the rigs to poles in the alley behind the telephone company where workmen would pick them up for the day's work. Later came the saddle-horse life with the three- and five-gaited "show" horses controlled, as his father taught him, by a gentle voice and a firm hand. He taught young girls and old women to ride. The smell of horse manure, he claimed, never left his clothes until he went to Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar.

For many years Paul delivered the Cedar Rapids Gazette on a route beginning at the corner of 4th Ave. and 15th St. SE and going to the city limits. The carrier boys' office was at the edge of the Cedar River, and the boys played along the dirty banks waiting for the afternoon edition, throwing cinder chunks at the long rats and boxing in a corner of the distribution room. Later, he started his deliveries and reached the end of his route miles away in the black, below zero night pierced by the cries of wolves. Fright came over him and he shook not with cold but with shock. He began to weep and ran all the way home, crying in the darkness.

One winter Paul fell through the ice and would have drowned save that the new First Avenue bridge in Cedar Rapids was being built above, and when he suddenly popped up in an air hole the other kids had timbers to shove to him so that he could crawl along them. Before he reached the pressroom, which was very warm, his clothes froze solid, and he could barely move inside them. They thawed next to the intense heat of the furnace that melted used lead rolls.

Paul Engle would never have gone to Coe College if it had not been for Miss Elizabeth Cook, a schoolteacher at Washington High School in Cedar Rapids. Miss Cook helped Paul when he was first beginning to read poetry and then later when he began to write it. Paul was her best student. One day he went to her apartment and showed her a letter from the Saturday Review of Literature. It said that his poems had been accepted and contained a check for \$10.00. "Miss Cook, look, I'm in the big money," Paul said.

However, when he first went to Coe, he had no money; his family was desperately poor, and his father could not help him. Paul didn't know how he would pay his tuition until the registrar of the college called him in and said, "You have been awarded a scholarship funded by an anonymous contributor."

During Paul's last year at Coe (1931), Miss Cook was killed by a car as she was crossing a street. It wasn't until the registrar of the college called Paul into his office and said, "The last thing that Miss Cook did before she died was to bring me this envelope," that he learned that she was his benefactor. In the envelope were the ten-dollar bills she had saved from her modest schoolteacher's salary with which she had paid Paul's tuition in silence until she died.

Old Gabriel Newburger, hanging on after several heart attacks with nitroglycerin, will power, and the poems he wrote about Ozark farmers he knew from his peddler father, was another of Paul's benefactors. Mr. Newburger owned a department store in Cedar Rapids. Paul visited him every day at his apartment in Cedar Rapids.

When Paul received his Rhodes Scholarship, Newburger asked: "What clothes are you going to wear, Paul?"

"What I have on," Paul said.

"No son of mine is going to live with those Englishmen looking the way you do," Gabe said. "Go down to the store and start out naked in the men's department. Get underwear, socks, two suits, shirts, neckties, and overcoat. Charge them to me."

Three years later when the old British ship the Aquitania brought Paul and his wife, Mary, back to New York from England they were waiting in third class when a purser called out Paul's name. He had a letter from Gabe, special delivery. The opening sentence read: "If

you brought one nickel back from Europe and didn't see everything you could, you are no son of mine." Included was the sum of \$25.

Paul met Stephen Vincent Benet in the early thirties as a graduate student at the University of Iowa when Benet visited the university. Paul had just won a fellowship from Columbia University for \$800, which was big money in those days. Benet seemed to have decided that Paul was a good risk as a young poet. He told Paul: "When you come to New York, call me." It was the beginning of a friendship which lasted until Benet's death in 1943.

In New York, the Benets invited Paul to have dinner with them on holidays or whenever they had visiting writers. In the spring he would go and spade their backyard in order to plant a few things in it. Once he unearthed a dead cat.

Paul also met many wonderful people in their house.: Philip Barry, the playwright who wrote "The Philadelphia Story"; William Butler Yeats; and John Masefield, the Poet Laureate of England.

At Columbia Paul's graduate major was English, but he was also interested in anthropology and studied with Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict, who were among the greatest scholars in their field at that time.

When Paul showed Stephen Benet the poetry he was writing, Benet said: "Look, go on. When you get a book length manuscript, let me take it. I'll get it published."

American Song was published by Doubleday in 1934 and its young author was hailed in the New York Times Book Review as "A New Voice in American Poetry."

One Saturday afternoon in 1932, Paul received a telegram saying that he had been nominated as a finalist for the Rhodes Scholarship if he could promise to be in Des Moines, Iowa, by Monday morning. Paul's fellowship money was in the Columbia University bank, locked up until Monday, and he had to be on an evening train west or he couldn't make the deadline. Such banks that in the bottom of the Depression were still operating had closed at noon. Paul's first thought was to call Steve Benet. So, halting work on a story, Benet went down to the Yale Club and sat there in the lobby cashing checks on anyone he knew who came in until he had the whole amount for Paul's fare out and back. Steve called Paul at 5:00 pm. Paul walked across the park from 123rd St. where he lived, got the money, and was on the westbound train with five minutes to spare.

Paul met Samuel Barlow on a Cunard Liner in 1932 when he made his first trip to England. Sam was a composer, symphonic conductor, and musical patron. He devoted most of his time to music. His opera *Mon Ami Pierrot* was performed in 1934 by L'Opera Comique in Paris, the first time the company staged an American's work. The French government awarded him the Legion of Honor. His Concerto for Magic Lantern and Symphony Orchestra, and his adaptation of *Babar, The Little Elephant*, were performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1936, directed by Leopold Stokowski.

Sam was also a liberal activist. His houses in Gramercy Park in New York, Eze in France, and his apartment in Paris were centers for artists and musicians. Paul met him by chance on the ship the night before they reached Europe. Paul had gone to the ship's bar for a drink, where two gentlemen sat at a nearby table.

After a while one of them said: "Come and have a drink with us." They talked and talked.

Finally, Sam said, "I suppose you write poetry."

Paul said: "You've read it?"

"No, never heard of you, but you look and talk like somebody who writes poetry."

Sam replied.

The Barlows had a music room in their house at Gramercy Park in New York. Sam's beautiful wife, Ernesta, had discovered an early-eighteenth-century chateau that had been neglected and was being torn down. They bought some walls from inside the house, shipped them back to New York, and had them built into a room in the Gramercy house, encasing the brick in the by-then-two-hundred-year-old French oak. Chamber music played in such a room kept its precise measure of vibration to the tiniest wavelength. "it was like sitting inside the music," Paul said.

It was the Barlows who first introduced Paul to opera. He arrived at the Metropolitan Opera House wearing a stocking cap, mackinaw jacket, and very heavy shoes called brogans. An usher in white tie, white gloves, and tails looked first at his ticket, then at his clothes, before leading him down a long beautiful corridor, all gilt and carvings, to the closest box to the stage. There sat Sam in his evening clothes and highly polished shoes. He stood up and said: "This is our hostess, Mrs. Vincent Astor." Paul was trying to stuff his stocking cap into his pocket when Mrs. Astor said gallantly: "Your cap looks as if it's very comfortable in this cold weather."

When Paul was at Oxford, he spent the first Christmas with the Barlows at Eze. Their house was built on the foundations of the Temple of Isis erected by the Romans. Three young Russian musicians came to the Christmas dinner. All of them had left the Soviet Union after the communists took over: Vladimir Horowitz, Gregor Piatigorsky, Nathan Milstein. Horowitz came with Wanda Toscanini, daughter of acclaimed Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini, whom he was about to marry. They had a very elaborate dinner with a great deal of wine - more wine than the corn-fed boy from Iowa was accustomed to. After dinner they went into the circular drawing room fronting the Mediterranean below. There Sam had a grand piano. Piatigorsky had not brought his cello. Milstein had not brought his violin. Nobody had expected to play, but when he saw the grand piano, Horowitz couldn't resist. He went over and started to play, showing off for Wanda, his bride-to-be. Paul, sitting on the floor opposite the piano, fell asleep. Horowitz decided that Paul should be woken up and began playing extremely loud chords on the piano, banging down as hard as he could, fortissimo. Paul did wake up, and everybody laughed.

More stories. More kindness. Paul once told me: "All my life, always there were people who did extra kind things for me." He returned their kindness by doing extra kind things for others, especially writers. He understood what it means when you lend a hand to a person at the crossroads in his or her life.

So, one last tale.

At Oxford, Paul encountered another world totally different from the one he had known in Iowa. His tutor, Edmund Blunden, the poet and shell-shocked survivor of World War I, had been in the first battle of the Somme when he was eighteen years old. It was the greatest catastrophe in British military history up to that time. Fifty-six thousand casualties between sunrise and sunset, every man a volunteer. Edmund and Paul became lifelong

friends.

Paul traveled extensively around England and on the Continent, from London to Kharkov, and from Stockholm to Sicily on vacation between Michaelmas, Hilary, and Trinity terms. He visited Stalinist Russia, and Nazi Germany where he lived with a German family and watched the horror unfold from the inside.

Paul spent his first summer vacation while at Oxford in 1934 in the mountains of Bavaria to learn German on his own. There he met Franz Mueller, whom he after called “the truest European” he ever knew. Franz invited Paul to spend Christmas with his family in Berlin-Friedenau, where Paul went often to a long, narrow bookstore near von Kleist Platz. There he discovered, in a very handsome and expensive edition, the poems of Rainer Maria Rilke. One day the owner invited him back down an aisle with a wall on one side and room after small room on the other, until they came to a room without windows or outside walls.

The old man said: “You like Rilke?”

“Yes,” Paul said.

The man left, returned, and put all the Rilke books on the table.

“Take. If you don’t, they will come and burn them.”

He did not use the word Nazis, it was always *They*. Then the old man called out to a closed door. An attractive girl of sixteen brought in tea and left. Pouring the tea, the old man repeated: “Take them. Take all of the books.”

“Why?” Paul asked. The man stared at him: “I am a Jew.” Then he turned and gestured toward the door through which the lovely young girl had entered and disappeared. “I am old. It does not matter. But my daughter, that girl. She must go. Out of Germany. We are the damned Jews. You are American. You are the lucky one. My daughter, Rebekah, get her out. Take her out. Leave me to die. We Jews are very skilled at dying...”

“I will try,” Paul said. “I will try.”

Once back in Iowa, Paul wrote to friends who could help. He also wrote the old man, but there was no reply.

After the publication of his book “American Song,” Paul broadcast his “Talk to America” at the invitation of the National Broadcast Company of England.

*

A Dialogue— The Iowa Writers’ Workshop

Hualing: Paul, tell me about the Writers' Workshop. It's such an important part of your life.

Paul: I don't see how we can be together all of these years without my talking about the Writers' Workshop. Because it was in my capacity as the director of the Writers' Workshop, the Rockefeller Foundation gave me a large grant in 1963 to go around the world, in particular Asia, and meet writers. So, if I had not built the Workshop into an instrument, if I may say so, no boasting, this is a fact, with national prestige—its reputation was everywhere,

the Foundation would never have given me that grant and I would not have met you. So, you see, things link together in human life.

When I came back from Oxford in 1936, I had no job. I was offered a job by Williams College in Massachusetts, a terribly good, nice college in a beautiful location in northwestern Massachusetts. I somehow felt I didn't want to settle down in New England. This was home.

H: Why? New England is so beautiful.

P: Well, it's a marvelous place, of course, but this was home. I wanted to be here a while. So, while I was here, a man named Norman Forster invited me to come and teach at the University of Iowa.

H: What was he?

P: He was the director of what was called the School of Letters. One of his greatest achievements was to offer students courses and credits in what was then called the creative writing for degrees.

H: The University offered it even in the '30s?

P: Oh, yes. I took my degree here with a book of original poetry.

H: But you were not the first to get that degree with a manuscript.

P: Not a manuscript. A book.

H: You were the first?

P: I cannot say that. I don't know anyone else who submitted a book of original poems as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts. To my knowledge, I was the first. That book, *Worn Earth*, had won the Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize, and I submitted that as my thesis.

H: Which year did you come to the University of Iowa?

P: 1937. Wilber Schremm ran the Writers' Workshop. I taught with him.

H: It was already called the Writers' Workshop?

P: Yes. It was his idea to call it that. However, when I took it over ...

H: He left?

P: He left. And when I took over the Writer's Workshop, it was nothing like it is today. It was one little class and there're eight students. All of them brilliantly untalented. So there I began. I had, if I may say so, absolute vision after the first Workshop meeting, I saw this is it. I wanted to get into this. I wanted to go on teaching writing, teaching contemporary literature, teaching the new English poetry, the new French, German poetry, and get a degree of our own, make writing something. It was a conscious thing; it didn't just happen by blind chance.

I grew up in a horse barn. I was accustomed to work. Furthermore, if you have to deal with administrators, it's very wise, if before that, you learn to deal with horses. You have to learn to be kicked around. No offense to the Dean or the President. But I was unknown here. I'd done a few things that they recognized academically, but there was opposition to the Writers' Workshop. You musn't think I was handed it on a platter. There were people who didn't want writers around. One of the senior members of the Department said, "You know what you oughta do with writers? Put'em in concrete and sink'em in the Iowa River."

Paul and Hualing laughing.

P: Do you know something? I would kick him in the ass before he could sink us in the Iowa River.

Both laughing again.

P: So I suddenly realized, Look, you can't leave it to chance. If you want talent, you gotta find out where talent is and then go get it, and for that, you need money. I established a chain of friends all around the country. Wally Stegner in Stanford, John Crow Ransom at

Kenyon College, Allen Tate at Suwani, somebody at Columbia, somebody at Harvard. They didn't have openings for writers. Every year, I would write to them and they would send me the names of their best people who had finished with work at those institutions. And I would bring them here. It's all fashionable now. We were the first. So gradually word got around: Iowa is the place.

That is why I began, if I may mention a subject many people don't like, why I began to raise money. I realized if I didn't raise money, most of that talent would not come to the Workshop, because it was a small university. There simply was not enough money within the University. The reason that the Writers' Workshop succeeded was largely due to the Graduate Dean, George Stardard, with whom I worked very closely. And the head of the English Department, Baldwin Maxwell, both of whom supported me, gave me such money as they could spare. Without them, the Workshop wouldn't have gone along, being a little tiny class without talent. So every year I had some scholarships and gradually a few research assistantships and then a few teaching assistantships. Now the teaching assistantships have grown into a major funding part of the Writers' Workshop. All of this is not merely history. It was because in the '40s and '50s I had managed with the help of these people to get the Workshop to bring terribly talented people, many of whom later went on to win Pulitzer Prize, National Book Award, The Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize which I won earlier in 1932. I then began going out for money. That took me to the Rockefeller Foundation. Whenever I went to New York, which I did two or three times a year, the Foundation was kind enough to see me. They would listen. Finally I did get a grant from them, first one they ever gave to a university for writers. But not permanent, of course. Finally one year, 1962, I was in New York in the autumn, and I said to the officer at the Foundation, "You know why I am here." He said, "Yes, you're looking for money. And you won't take no for answer." I said, "Maybe I will this time, if you're not clever enough to say yes." He said, "Well, look, why don't you have a look at writers in other places. I know you had three years in Europe, and you met all the new English writers, so famous. I feel you ought to expand your horizon by going away from a semester in particular to Asia." So, I went to Asia, and met you in Taiwan.

When I was the director of the Writers' Workshop, I took intense interests in their lives, not only their writing.

H: That's very important.

P: I was constantly meeting strangers, whom I had admitted to the Writers' Workshop. They had to submit writing in order to be able to come. At the bus station, at the railway station. They didn't come by plane, there was no plane at that time. Furthermore, they couldn't have afforded it. And I got them rooms. I got some of our writers, after they had been here a year or two, to manage rooming houses; they would put up the young writers coming in, who had no place to stay, in the basement on a mattress behind the furnace.

H: I noticed that when I first met you in Taiwan in 1963, you tried very hard to get the visa for Wai-lim Yep's wife. You know how important the wife is to the poet.

P: Of course, I know! (A naughty smile.) Oh, I made the Writers' Workshop a very large affair.

H: Which year did you resign?

P: I resigned in 1966, I think.

H: Paul, maybe the time was right for you to develop the Workshop. Just after the World War II. Many young people came back from the war, from the army, they were talented and they had no place to go, and they came here, and became very famous writers.

P: This was absolutely right, Hualing. Because here, there was a place which recognized talent, and here, they felt completely at home to do anything they wanted.

H: Paul, at that time, it was a "writer boom." Right?

P: Yes! A writer boom.

H: That generation, immediately after Hemingway's generation, many of them have become very good writers.

P: Yes. For example, a young poet from Pennsylvania, his name was W.D. Snodgrass. He had just come back from the Navy in the South Pacific. I got him a little grant on the basis of one poem he sent. It was obvious that he had talent. I had, if I may say so, a nose for sniffing out talent. The way a dog sniffs out a bone. And so D. came. He turned out to be an absolute talent.

H: Later he won what prize?

P: He won the Pulitzer Prize for a book of poems called "Heart's Needle." He had written all of those poems while he was in Iowa City. Of course, for all of the incredible number of writers who came to Iowa City, whom I brought, I don't take credit. I didn't give them the talent. I gave them a chance. That's really all a person with talent needs. A chance.

H: It's also true with Flannery O'Conner, right?

P: Yes. I was sitting in my office one morning. There was a shy knock at the door and the young lady walked in. I said, Good morning. She mumbled something. I said, Oh, God, I've got a bad case on my hands. And she repeated it. Then I said, You know, I'm terribly sorry, I don't hear it very well, would you mind writing it down.

H: When was this? In the early '40s?

P: A little later than that. '46 or '47. And she wrote on a piece of paper, My name is Flannery O'Conner. I am from Georgia. I am a writer. Unlike most students, she didn't say I want to be a writer. She just flatly said, I am a writer. I said, you have anything I can look at? She had what I think Grandmother used to call a reticule, one of the oldest, most battered pouches I have ever seen, just sort of torn up. She handed me a short story. I read the first paragraph, and I said, You are a writer. It was the best prose I read in a long time. So I said, Please come. And she wrote a book here called "Wise Blood". A very original book. The thesis is in the library of the University and is dedicated to me. It was wonderful to have Flannery. She stayed on another year.

H: You told me how you discussed a scene with her. About rape?

P: No, not about rape at all. She brought me everything she wrote, as everyone did. I saw everyone personally, both poets and fiction writers. Well, at that time we didn't have any staff, you know, until some years later the department allowed me to hire a couple of people. I did everything. They brought the work to me in the office and I would read it. Then I saw everyone personally in a critical discussion of their writing. So I was talking with Flannery in my office about a scene of a young man, as I remember, and I maybe remember it wrongly, a young man and a young woman. I think they were on a porch of a house in a southern city. Maybe they weren't on a porch. It didn't matter where they were. I said, Flannery, this is not really accurate.

H: About what?

P: About making love. I said, Flannery you have to allow me to ask you, Did you ever... Before I could finish my sentence, she stopped me. And she said this marvelous southern expression, You all hush.

H: You all hush meaning don't talk?

P: You all shut up. Then she said, Not in your office. At that time, we had a parking lot across the street from the old English building. And I said, Flannery, let's go

outside, let's go to my car. So we went out to my car. It was a warm day and the windows were down. Flannery said, Put up the windows.

H: She was embarrassed.

P: Terribly embarrassed. So, we talked about half an hour. She blushed deeply and made no comment. Finally, I said, Flannery, rewrite it and bring it back to me. She said, I don't know, meaning she wasn't sure she'd bring it back.

That was what the Workshop did. It brought in, in a sense, the wounded, and the unexperienced, and the uncertain, and the confused,

H: But people with talent.

P: Yes. All of them were talented. No, not all. There were a few that turned out really no talent, or they were lazy and didn't work. D. finished his manuscript and sent it off to Knoff, I think it was Knoff. The poetry editor there took it, and he won the Pulitzer Prize. This was very fast transition from having a rough life in the anti-Japanese war in the South Pacific to winning the Pulitzer Prize for poetry.

That happened a lot. For example, a young poet came in one day and said, I'm leaving. I said, look, you can't leave, you're just beginning to write your best poetry. He said, I have a choice, I can either eat or pay my rent, but I can't do both. So I said, What are you going to do. He said, Well, join the army and go to Vietnam. I said, I think maybe you better not make that decision; give me a couple of days, come back in two days; let me see what I can do. So I called Anna Meredith in Des Moines and said, I've got a fine talent here; he's leaving because he doesn't have enough money to live on, and the university has no money to give him. There was no choice, either go along with an ordinary class of ordinary people, or go out and get the money and bring the real talents, which I did. The next day a thousand dollars came.

H: That's James Tate, right?

P: James Tate.

H: Later he won...

P: The Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize.

H: That's all? I think he won another...

P: Well, then later on he wrote more books, of course. And he won more prizes. So, Jim was an example of what the Workshop could do for people. I don't say he would never become a poet. It would take him years longer. You see, what the Workshop did was put the people of talent, unrealized talent, often, together with other people of talent. They taught each other. That was a very exciting time.

As I have told you, teaching was a shared experience. For years I taught both the Fiction and Poetry Workshops, which meant reading and criticizing a mass of manuscripts each week. I began to mimeograph the manuscripts to be discussed, which meant a long trip from the barracks by the Students' Union up the hill to the English Department. The instructors would all read the poems or short stories and then meet an hour before the Workshop met to talk over critical attitudes. By the time we went into the classroom, we had a clear sequence of comments and the students benefited greatly from having a variety of attitudes toward their work. It was like publishing then being reviewed. Don Justice and I differed enough in our approaches to poetry so that each supplied points of view which each might have omitted if teaching alone. It was in these conferences that much of the most effective criticism was achieved. There was a strong sense of community not only among staff, but also among students.

I would work a long day. Every evening after dinner, I would sit at my typewriter in my hog house study in the back yard, and type letters to young writers all over the country,

and even abroad. I would also write letters for money. Then I would drive down with all of the mail, and every night there was a lot of mail, not to the post office, because they would be sat there until the next day. I drove to the railroad station. Rock Island Railroad had a train through Iowa City about 11:30 every night going from Omaha or Denver, I forget where it came from, to Chicago. They had a mail car. They sorted mail as the train went to Chicago. And by law they had to accept mail. So I would be there, and the Rock Island would whistle, whistle way down west up here. They whistled a long time ahead to warn people crossing the streets. They would pull into the Rock Island Station in Iowa City, and I knew where the mail car was, way at the end of the train. By then the men knew me. So I would be there, and they would open the door; it's a big door. I would pass up the Writers' Workshop mail, which was going out to young poets and fiction writers all over the United States. I did that because it would speed up their arrival by a day.

H: You always have a sense of urgency.

P: I always felt it was urgent to write to a writer.

H: You still have a sense of urgency about the mail. Paul, do you miss that way of life?

P: Well, I am enjoying my present way of life with you! However, I must say, I did enjoy my many years, twenty-five, of association with the young. I missed teaching. I loved the students. I taught well. I taught the first class in contemporary writing ever taught in this university. It became so popular that it had to move from room to room, bigger room, bigger room. I do miss that association with young people. I enjoyed watching them develop and they enjoyed the help I gave them. I brought them the development of the written word up to the time that they were here. It was a new concept, if I may say so.

H: At that time?

P: At that time. They are everywhere now, although not the form. I introduced the European literature in translation course, and they read all kinds of writers. They were young, they were talented, they were terribly eager. Some of them didn't like criticism. Well, you have to be criticized, that's what Writers Workshop is for.

There was a poet. He got furious every time I criticized a phrase in his poems. He brought us... We call it gunny. It's a rough woven fabric, usually come from somewhere in Asia. He brought a gunny to the Workshop one day. He put it down, he sat in the front. So we began to talk about the poems. One of them was his, and I criticized the last line. I said, look, it's a fine poem, but all of the previous lines should culminate in a much powerful end line than this line. All of a sudden, the sack began to hiss. Whenever I criticized any phrase, the sack would hiss at me.

H: There was a snake in the sack?

P: No, there were several!

Paul and Hualing laughing.

P: I want to go back, mailing the letters all over. Look, these were young boys and girls, they were eager to hear from me and come to the Workshop. After I turned in my mail at the train, which got to Chicago a day ahead of mailing it in the post office, I'd often then go down to a bar on Dubuque Street, and there would be some of the Workshop students still discussing not only the poems or the stories, which had been discussed that afternoon, but also discussing Engle's criticism, and often criticizing Engle's criticism, just as hard as they criticized their poems or stories. And so I'd sit down and have a beer with them,

H: What's the name of that bar?

P: Donnelly's.

H: How did you feel when you confronted so many talents? P: Mark Strand was in a class that, in the same time, Dee Snodgrass was there, Donald Justice was in it. It was exactly like a lion walking into a den of Daniels. I mean you're scared to death of that kind of talent. And I got put down constantly. I read a poem by a man in the workshop which I thought had a weak line. I said, Look, this line is so much worse than all the rest of the poem. Silence. Then, the poet looked at me and said with contempt, I mean real, beautifully poised contempt, The New Yorker took it yesterday.

H: Paul, you know Robert Frost very well. Tell me about him. I read his poetry before I came to Iowa.

P: I was very lucky for the people I've known. Wonderful people, like Robert Frost. On my return from Oxford in 1936, I received a telegram from him, saying "Come to compare farms." I lived on his farm at South Shasbury, Vermont one summer. I have an unpublished manuscript about a summer when we went camping on Lake Winipissocki, a marvelous story, and it was written by one of his daughters and I had permission to take a copy. I lived with him there. I flew with Robert Frost the first time he ever went up in a plane. I walked with him in Vermont, Iowa, New York, Havana, Cambridge. We were in South Miami. A novelist called Hervey Allen had made a lot of money on a novel, and instead of building a great house, he built five or six little houses in about ten acres and invited his friends to stay with him. So Frost lived in one little house and I lived in another with Mary. Late at night I would always hear this same noise. He had a recorder made of some sort of fruit wood, pear, I think. He dreaded going to sleep for fear of a recurring nightmare. So I would walk with him every night all around these little lanes made of crushed coral. Finally I would get sleepy, and we would go back, and he would go and walk more. When he came back he would get out his recorder. He would play three tunes over and over and over. When they stopped, I knew they had put him to sleep

Frost made his first visit to the University of Iowa in 1939. I wrote a poem, Homage to Robert Frost. Twenty years later, Robert Frost, 85 years old, revisited the University of Iowa in 1959, when I was the Director of the Writers' Workshop. After his reading, I walked him to the hotel; he walked me home, then I walked him out the edge of Iowa City and left him there. He walked back alone.

Pause.

P: Hualing, I lived long periods of time in Europe—Oxford, London, Paris, Berlin, Oxford. But I prefer the corner of Clinton St. and Washington street in Iowa City.

H: Why?

P. Because along the tree-lined street and past the old red brick buildings walked some of the best writers and artists in the USA.

They're still walking there. Taking mail for the Writer's Workshop, and my own poems, to the late Rock Island train each night, as I did for many years, I could see lights in little apartments above the stores and know that some damn good writing was filling up a lot of paper.

Now many of those places are just holes in the air, but I am haunted by the talent which I know once lived in that space, often miserably, often with one dime ahead.

There are endless cities in the world there I could not feel at home, fascinating as they are to visit. The University of Iowa gambled on me as a poet-student, gambled on me as a poet-teacher.

[...]

That Little Boat

Fall in Iowa is beautiful. It takes you by surprise. The golden tints of fall drips on the branches, a little every day, day by day, tantalizingly slow. But suddenly it seems that she can't hold it back any longer and splashes out in an extravaganza of gold and crimson. As you lift your eyes, you are startled and can't help exclaiming: Oh, so beautiful! But the beauty of fall is short lived. Just as swiftly as it descends on you, so it steals away. It takes only one rainy night to drive it away, leaving leaves and bared branches scattered around. Winter in Iowa is long and cold, reminding one of the freezing winters of northern China. After leaving the mainland in 1949 I lived in Taiwan for fifteen years and never had a glimpse of snow. I came to Iowa in 1964, the first snowfall came at night, blanketing the ground. I went out with friends and we sunk our feet in the thick snow on the sidewalk and shouted in delight. Spring is slow in coming. It teases when you ignore it: the first chirp of a bird, the glint of sunshine on the crackling ice in the Iowa River, the little deer wandering idly in the woods, the blooming cheeks of girls brought up on wholesome Iowa milk, the lingering shades of sunset over the river. Summer is the season of the young. As the long-awaited summer finally makes its appearance, young people would stretch themselves out on the river bank, in the utmost possible state of undress, sunning themselves, the face covered by a book. Some of them wander aimlessly by the river, others with folders under their arms are rushing to class, or say Hi as they flash by on their bikes down the path by the river.

The little town of Iowa City displays its charm for each of the seasons, thanks to the river. The Iowa River runs through the university campus, into the Mississippi River. The newcomers always want to go to see Mark Twain's river. Shortly after my arrival, Paul took me to see his Big River.

I stood on the banks of the Mississippi and said: It doesn't have the majesty of the Yangtze River.

Paul laughed, saying: This is our biggest river.

We had a boat which could hold six or seven people; it was usually moored by the Coralville Dam. We often took my two daughters to the little boat. They would swim, or Paul would teach them to surf on the water. Meanwhile I would steer the boat around--I had learned to steer a boat before I could drive a car. This was all due to the lure of water. I love water-- creek water, lake water, river water, ocean water, I love them all. Paul loved riding, tennis and swimming. He enjoyed the fluidity of rippling water and the shock of waves lashing at him. It was Paul all over. He tried everything to lure me into the water, but I wouldn't be tempted. He couldn't prevail and often said with regret: Wouldn't it be wonderful for us to be swimming together? He loved dogs and I feared them. Before our wedding, he said he wanted to have a dog. I said: Do you want me or the dog? Swimming and having dogs were the two things that Paul missed with me.

Sometimes Paul and I would carry a basket of food and drink, go up the river in our boat and moor in a quiet little bay, right under the cool shade of the weeping willow. There was a little charcoal burner on the boat. Paul would start a fire, hand me a glass of sherry, mix himself a martini, and jump into the water. The water was a muddy color, but it was only the reflection of the dark soil at the bottom of the river. I would watch him swimming as I grilled paper-thin slices of beef over the burner. After his swim, he would clamber up the boat, take a sip of the martini, and said: What a life!

Glasses in hand, we would chat, rambling on any subject under the sun. That little boat was another-worldly home for us, and would provide us with a miniature of the human condition.

It was during one such excursion that I, on the spur of the moment, said: Paul, why not start an international writers' program?

Are you crazy! Paul said.

Sometimes.

Aren't there enough crazy writers on the campus of the University of Iowa? Do you know what I was up against? When the Writer's Workshop was first started, I heard a professor saying at the President's cocktail party: All the writers should be tied to rocks and thrown into the ocean. Paul laughed and continued: Know what, before he has a chance to throw us into the ocean, I will kick him in the ass.

And thus from that little boat, the International Writing Program of the University of Iowa was born in the year of 1967. Over one thousand writers have come to Iowa City from many parts of the world. From that little boat, Paul and I started together to witness the joys, the disasters, the deaths and the survival of the human life of the 20th century.

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Days in the Auschwitz Camp

On New Year's Eve 1970, writers in the program held a masquerade party at the home of Czech writer Arnost Lustig. Dressed in our ghastly costumes, Paul and I attended with our daughters. When we entered, Lustig greeted us, "Welcome to Auschwitz!" The four members of his family wore tattered t-shirts, and had painted blood on their faces and the black codes of prisoners on their arms. They began to sing, in unison, the German folk song "The Shark":

Ah the shark, he has teeth, but his teeth are never seen.
And the thief, he has a knife, but his knife is never seen. . . .

As they sang, they danced enthusiastically, like they were under a spell. As they sang and danced without interruption, the other party guests joined in the celebration: Germans, French, Swiss, Japanese, Indonesians, Ugandans, Nigerians, Egyptians, Chinese . . . the frenzy lasted the whole night.

During World War II, Lustig had been imprisoned with his parents at the camps in Auschwitz, Poland, when he was only nine years old. His father died in the gas chambers. One day, through the net of an electric fence, he saw a group of women approach the camp, naked and emaciated. Suddenly, he caught sight of his mother among the women. He cried to her. She looked his way, but wore only a blank expression on her face.

In 1972, Paul and I traveled to Auschwitz via Krakow. The Polish poet Marek Skwarnicki, who had once been a guest in our program, acted as our guide. His family had been interned in a camp during the war, as well. He was ten at the time. There had been so many prisoners that the Nazis ran out of gas chambers. Even though prisoners were put in the camp to be executed, they could not be killed immediately. There, entering the gas chambers was called "taking a bath." One day, a guard told Marek it was his turn to "take a bath." Marek thought he was done for. Instead, Marek was led away to take an actual shower, an unusually luxurious practice. The reason, Marek found out, was that the war had, in fact, ended. His family members gathered one by one, until only his sister had yet to come. In her place, one of her cellmates appeared, carrying a watch that had belonged to her. It seemed she had died at the camp. One year later, as Marek played in the streets, he suddenly saw his

sister approaching. He cried out like he had seen a ghost, then burst into tears.

We entered through a huge cast-iron gate. In front of us were rows of brick buildings black with grime. Puffs of hellishly moist air made our flesh crawl. Fences of doubled wire circled the brick buildings, crowned with watch tower after watch tower, each one fitted with machine guns. The empty strip near the fence was a “no-man’s land.” The tower guards were told that any prisoner who approached that area was attempting to escape, and was to be shot on sight. A skull hung on the iron gate, along with a large sign that read “Stop!” Anyone close enough to read the sign knew they must obey or risk their own skull ending up there.

The barracks near the entrance had been turned into a museum. The tokens left by the prisoners were displayed in glass cases. One room contained childhood possessions: dolls with broken arms, shabby little shoes, tiny skirts made of Scottish wool, chunks of building blocks, a half-string of pearls, a sketched profile of a horse’s head, a small horn, a book of fairytales, its cover showing Snow White fallen into a sweet sleep. Someone had placed a bouquet of blossoming red roses on the windowsill.

Items left by the adults were arranged in other rooms, nothing but traces of the everyday life of the working class: sewing machines, shaving knives, needle kits, toothbrushes, pens, cameras, pots, plates, bowls, cups, long skirts, bifocals with broken frames, a wristwatch stopped at twenty past three, a yellow shawl with black stripes, and an artificial leg made of stainless steel. Pile after pile of suitcases scribbled with names and addresses. On one was scrawled *Orphan*. A glass cupboard was filled with all kinds of currency: British pounds, American dollars, Francs, even a small Manchurian coin. Their owner had somehow escaped Japanese brutality only to fall into the Nazi camps, carrying only a single cent.

Locks of women’s hair was piled in another room: shining golden threads, some splayed out, some in braids, others twisted into buns so smooth they could only have been formed by an elegant woman. By the time the war ended, more than twenty pounds of hair had been accumulated. The Nazis kept the hair to stuff mattresses, form fabric, and even make bullets. Photos of the captives hung on the walls of each room. They stared at the guests, their eyes alarmed and despairing. Some of the visitors that streamed in were even German.

Prisoners sentenced to die were kept in a place known as the “death alley.” A Polish priest named Kurt had stayed in room number eighteen. When he found out his cellmate, who had a wife and children, was to be sent to the chambers, Kurt went in his place. On a railing near the entrance to the small dark room a bouquet of white carnations hung. Number twenty was barely large enough to lay three mattresses edge to edge, but thirty-nine people had been crammed inside. Half of them died of suffocation. In number fifteen, the prisoners had been so hungry fed on the human liver they were offered. On the wall of number twenty-one, someone had scratched a woman holding a baby in her arms had with their fingernails.

A train car carried to condemned prisoners to the gas chambers, which were located somewhere outside the walls of the camp. The Nazis burned the site as they retreated, and the protruding chimneys and watch towers were all that was left of the chambers. Marek, Paul and I climbed to the platform of one of the watch towers. A fine rain blurred our sight,

and even when I strained my eyes, all I could see was withered yellow grass. A train whistle suddenly sounded, and Marek jumped. He didn't speak for a moment, then turned to us and said, "Back when the Nazis stood in these towers, I couldn't help but feel that they were the victors. Now even though I'm the one standing up here, I don't feel even a little victorious."

"Why not?" I asked.

Marek didn't respond.

Just then, a huge black Soviet car blew through the camp's iron gate.

*

[...]

Vignettes from *The Deer Garden*

Woman and Man

Love consists in this, that two solitudes protect and touch and greet each other—
Rainer Maria Rilke

1. In 1963, Paul visited Taiwan for three days. I went to the cocktail party the US Information Service's Taipei office hosted for him as the Director of the Iowa Writers Workshop, to allow him to meet writers. I met him again at the dinner afterwards. The host seated me next to him. Paul cracked jokes, laughed loudly, enjoyed being the center of attention. All of a sudden, he turned to me: "Would you like to go to Iowa? I read your stories in translation." "No," I said. "I have two children. And I can't get an exit permit because of my link to a magazine shut down by the government." 10 months later, in the fall of 1964, I came to the Writers' Workshop, seven books of fiction and translations published in Taiwan in my luggage. Later Paul wrote about his visit to Taiwan: *I have a photograph someone took of me picking up, for the first time in my life, a slippery pigeon egg with chopsticks. My grin of triumph is the stupidest I have ever recorded. Several of the guests are looking at me. Hualing is laughing. I have never eaten a pigeon egg since. One was enough to do the trick. Now when I see pigeons swarming over a barnyard in Iowa or flying across railroad tracks searching for spilled grain, or taking off in flight, gracefully beating their iridescent wings, I give them my silent gratitude for helping me make Hualing laugh, later walk out with me. It changed the rest of my life.*

2. I was struck at first sight by Paul's fascinating grayish-blue eyes. They were shifting with emotions--affectionate, amusing, piercing, witty, naughty, cunning. They could be fierce if he had to fight for a cause he believed in. For 24 years (1942-1966), he fought for the Writers' Workshop then for 21 years (1967-1988) for the International Writing Program. The University of Iowa was the first institution [in the US? in the world?] to bring to its campus the established writer as a permanent teacher, and the aspiring writer as a student. Paul said: "When I took over the Writer's Workshop in 1942, it was one little class and there were eight students. All of them brilliantly untalented. So I began to work to build it up. And gradually, I did make it. I worked very hard to recruit talent all over the country. It was a conscious thing; it didn't just happen by blind chance."

In one of Paul's poems he describes himself:

*A cornfield kid, crazy for English words,
Old scarecrow lonesome for the screaming birds.*

3. The Green Mansion, an Italianate stone manse on a hilltop in Stone City, Iowa had been the site of Grant Wood's Art Colony during the summers of 1932 and 1933. Wood had by then become celebrated for his painting *American Gothic*. Paul's first wife's family, the Nissens, owned the Green Mansion and the Engles lived there after their return to Iowa from Oxford, in 1936. In 1963 it burned down Paul took me to visit the ruin 1968. It was the first time since the fire that Paul could bring himself to visit it, with my company. As we were walking the path up the winding hill, he murmured to himself "*It was the most marvelous place, the most beautiful house, the most beautiful hills -- and we had this great outdoor happy life here. This is scary to me -- it's all so dark in here now. There were no trees around here; all of this was open. And you could see for miles across the valley. No, I could weep just to think of it. In this round tower, I had a room. This was Sara's little pasture for her horses. I know too much about what happened in each of those rooms. There's nothing there, now. Just a ruin inside. It burned from the evening to the next evening. You see, the whole interior was oak and pine; very old, very dry. And it burned like that. When we lived here, I kept it so well, the grass mowed, all of the little trees cut, everything painted. Many of these trees I planted myself. That was the base for the water tower; there was a well in the bottom of that. There's nothing there now. I built a desk in there, with my hands, curving with the wall. I wrote the only novel that I ever wrote here, Stone City, I wrote it one summer. ALWAYS THE LAND. Oh, it's spooky to have everything change....*

4. In the memoir *A LUCKY AMERICAN CHILDHOOD* Paul wrote about his father: *Tom was an old horse himself, this handler of horses and any animal: noisy, tough-bodied, no fat, a good feeder, driving himself as hard as he drove his horses and children, twice as strong as his slender body looked, beating his way through the hard world of horses and horsemen, working his 5:00AM to 9:00PM day, seven days a week the year round to support a wife and four kids on an income always so tiny that he never paid an income tax. A tough old bastard who held back his emotions (except for rage if you didn't ride up to his high standard) until they exploded in him, and wept. He died in my arms after he fell from the horse he had just been riding.*

5 Giving a poetry reading or talk Paul would say: "I'm from the Iowa corn fields." In this picture, he is smoking a civilized pipe amidst the corn fields. Maybe he had just returned from Oxford where he had spent three years (1933-36) as a Rhodes Scholar. At the first dinner back with his family in Cedar Rapids, the first sentence his father spoke was, "You'd goddam well better start speaking American!" He published the book of poems AMERICAN SONG during his stay at Oxford. It was hailed as "A New Voice in American Poetry". He traveled around Europe and learned a great deal about the horrors of life in Nazi Germany and Mussolini's Italy. He wrote BREAK THE HEART'S ANGER during two summers while living on a Bavarian farm.

6. I arrived in Iowa City the day before the Hawkeye's were to fight one of the Big Ten teams. It was the first time I went to a football game, wearing a huge yellow mum. Paul always hosted a party at home after the game. He showed us his "hog house" in the backyard. A worn-out chair was buried under a mass of manuscripts, letters, and books. He told us; "Home is not always the most beautiful place. I always wanted to go home. In 1937 I got a call from Norman Forster, director of the School of Letters at the University of Iowa. After two American and two Oxford degrees and some prizes and five books, I was offered \$1250 per year to teach workshops, freshman English, and Contemporary Literature. A graduate dean offered me another \$1250 on the shady excuse that it was a research grant. So there I began and I had, if I may say so, an absolute vision after the first Workshop meeting; I saw that this is it."

7. I laughed at a joke Paul cracked at his football party. [is that the picture you are associating to? Then "I am laughing at a joke Paul is cracking at his..." would be better] A prospective contributor asked about the Writers Workshop. Paul said: "Wilber Schramm had begun the Writer's Workshop and I joined him in helping him teach it. The important thing is that in this university and in this pleasant city, I felt that to be a writer, a poet, was like being an insurance salesman, a clerk in a drug store, which I had been for years, a filling station operator, a doctor, a dentist, a feed salesman; that is to say, a person contributing to the survival of the people. I have been in many countries in Europe and Asia. But I prefer the corner of Clinton and Washington streets in Iowa City. Why? Because along the tree-lined street and past the old red brick buildings walked some of the best writers and artists in the USA. They are still walking there."

8. My daughters came to Iowa in 1965, a year after my arrival. Paul and I drove to pick them up at the Iowa City Airport. We hugged in tears. Wei Wei was 14, Lan Lan 13. The two girls would have a hard time adjusting to the American life.

11. Paul tried to get me and Wei Wei on a horse back. "No," I said. "I don't like animals." It was one of his regrets about me. He said: "I love children, animals and"--with a sly smile-- "women".

12. Paul was an outdoorsman. He used to take us to Coralville Lake, a man-made reservoir between Cedar Rapids and Iowa City, and have a swim with the girls. He had prepared a basket of sandwiches, stuffed eggs and fruit. We would have a picnic on the reservoir's bank. He would also take us to visit Tina and Vance Boujaily's Redbird Farm. We hiked on the trails. He and the girls swam in the pond. All of us enjoyed apple-picking together.

13. In the summer 1965 Paul drove us to the Iowa State Fair. Fresh from the water-bound Taiwan, the girls loved the vast corn fields, and sang Chinese songs as we drove towards Des Moines. "It's fun!" Lan Lan mimicked Paul. He laughed: "Lan Lan, you speak English!" We put on the colorful feather hats Paul bought at the fair. Andy Williams was performing at the Fair. A farmer in overalls stopped and asked Paul: "Are you some kind of vaudeville act?" "Yes," Paul said, laughing. He took a picture of us with his ancient camera.

14. The boy and the pig he raised had won the 4H award at the fair. Paul asked him to have a picture taken with us: the Iowa pig and the Chinese girls. Paul was proud of both.

15. That same year my two daughters and I visited the Statue of Liberty during our trip to New York. We were amazed at the statue of a graceful woman wearing a flowing gown, a point-spiked crown and holding a torch of gold flame high in the sky. For someone who had escaped the Communists' takeover of China and then the repression of Chiang Kai-shek's regime in Taiwan it felt like a great moment.

16. The Iowa winter was very long, with a great deal of snow. Fresh from the tropical Taiwan, I loved walking in the snow, enjoyed it cracking with each step. I was so happy to come upon the white blossoms that resembled the plum blossoms my mother used to have for the Chinese New Year when I was little. I used to listen to my grandfather chanting the Tang poems about the white plum flowers.

17. I love the willows. The picture was taken by Paul in 1965. Years later when Paul and I settled down in the house on the hill overlooking the Iowa River, he planted a willow tree in front of our house. He died 1991. The willow followed the next year.

18. In 1966 Paul went to Europe for two months. He wrote from Paris on April 5th: *... I do miss you terribly, and especially when I come back to my dingy and lonely room each night and crawl sadly into bed. It is also true that I miss you when I see something really fine and can't share it with you, such as Notre Dame floodlit at night, the tall flying buttresses throwing supple shadows on the walls and windows, something which the people who built it never saw. At such times, I curse the seventeen years too many, sitting like a monkey on my back, which make whatever barrier there is between you and me. Who knows--one day you may visit Paris with me.....*

19. I have lived my three lives--China, Taiwan and Iowa—on the waters. Now, I am on the Iowa River. On Easter Sunday 1966 Paul wrote from Mont Saint Michel, France: *...In the excitement of new places and travel and different people, I could go along alone, but out on this beautiful and wild peninsula, I miss you terribly. The landscape reminds me of the endless times we went out to the country to be with each other, and I wish you could be here sharing all this with me. It seems like eternity until I see you again. The happiest day of the trip will be heading home....*

20. In Paris in 1966 Paul wrote: *...I carry your tiny passport picture with me and look at it regularly.....* 1991 he collapsed at the O' Hare Airport, Chicago on our way to Europe. I found the picture still in his wallet after 25 years.

21. Paul and I went to a friend's cocktail party in Iowa City. Paul had an A-frame house in the corn fields. He loved when I joined him for a drink at the end of the day. We would drink and talk--his life and family, my life and family, writing, writers, friends. The dialogue could go like this:

Hualing--I don't think your father would have liked me. This odd Chinese woman. What is Paul doing with her?

Pau--Well, he knew what I was doing with her! (Laughing.) Fooled you, fooled you!

Hualing--Your father would say, This goddam fool!

Paul--He would have liked you, Hualing. Yes, my father would have liked you. He would have immediately realized that you are a very nice lady.

Hualing--Lady! I don't think he liked ladies.

Paul--What did he like?

Hualing--He liked women, not ladies.

Paul--I just assume that all men would like you.

Hualing--Your father would like me, e. e. cummings would like me, Steven Benet would like me, Edmund Blunden would like me....

Paul--You wiped out an entire generation!

22. Paul and I on our way to a banquet in Chicago in 1967. It was required that men wear tails. Paul was ill at ease with the formal outfit. He loved his worn-out olive-green shirt and jeans. He was walking from the barracks of the Workshop to the Old Capital. A man approached him, asking: "Are you an electrician?" He laughed: "Yes, I am." In 1974 we went to India and met Sunil Gangopadhyay, the Indian poet, in Calcutta. He had been in Paul's workshop in the early 1960s. "Paul," he said "you wore the same olive-green shirt ten years ago!"

23. "It's good to be with you, Paul," I said.

"I worry," he said.

"Why?"

"My anxiety is the old one--time, age, years, the fear of becoming inactive when you still are lively and eager and lovely. Selfishly, I could marry you and have the joy of living with you,

but what joy for you in ten years when the rest of the thinning hair is either gray or gone? That worries me, and causes me to think about the injustice of my cutting you off from life.”

24.

Paul Engle:

LIGHT *Sunset: a cloud the color of your skin
When luminous with river water, bare
Above, a sky steadily turning blue
That soon will be as live-black as your hair.*

*Light alters day. Love alters us. We are
The woman and the man each knew before,
But changed by love's abruptness, as a dark
Room burns with sunlight from an opened door.*

25. We would see Ralph Ellison and his wife Fanny every time we went to New York in the 1960s and the 1970s. He found me wearing the jade ring my mother left me. He pointed at the jade ring he was wearing: “From China. Very old.” Twenty years later, in February of 1991 Ralph and Fanny made a point of going to see Paul and me at a friend’s in New York. “Hualing, the jade ring,” he pointed at it on his finger. That was the last time we saw him. Paul passed away one month later. Ralph was gone in 1994. Nelson Algren and Kurt Vonnegut had been instructors at the Writers Workshop during the year of 1965-1966. Vonnegut stayed on another year, and wrote *Slaughterhouse Five* in a 19th-c house on Brown Street. Paul and I would meet him every time we came to New York. He told us a story about Nelson Algren. Algren won the 1981 Literary Award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. Vonnegut, a member of the Institute, called him and expected him to receive it at the ceremony. “Mail it to me,” Algren said. However, he was going to have a party to celebrate at home. Vonnegut called the day before the party. “Sag Harbor Police Department,” a man answered. Vonnegut said: “Sorry. Wrong number.” “Who are you calling?” “Nelson Algren.” “This is his house. But Mr. Algren is dead.”

26. Wei Wei was independent, rational, reliable, with a dry sense of humor. She did not have acquaintances--only devoted friends. Paul and my two girls had a beautiful relationship. 1965, a few months after they came from Taiwan, Paul broke his ankle broke in New York, after a meeting of the National Arts Council. He limped out of the plane with one arm on a crutch, the other carrying a large music box, a singing red bird in a golden cage. It was a gift for Wei Wei and Lan Lan. Years later, Anthea, my granddaughter, became its keeper.

27. Lan Lan spoke little English then. A few months after the girls arrived to Iowa City, Paul was going to Europe. The day before his departure, I heard some noise in the kitchen at midnight. The next morning, I found a small package of popcorn cooked Paul’s special way and a note on the kitchen table. Lan Lan left them there before she went to school. The note was written in English: “Mr. Engle, corn for you. You come back, I speak English for you--Lan Lan.” She tried hard to fit in. She played the leading role in “South Pacific: at Iowa City High

School. As she marched into the football arena holding the stars-and-stripes as the color guard captain, Paul was touched to tears.

28. With his divorce granted, Paul and I were finally getting married in May of 1971. We intended to have a civil marriage. He asked what kind of wedding ring I would like. The cheapest, I said. My two girls drove me to the Court House in Iowa City, saying: "We are taking our Mama to her wedding." Paul and friends were waiting for us in front of the Court House. "Oh God! The wedding ring!" Paul was flabbergasted. "You lost it?" I asked, half amused, half-disappointed. The girls rushed back to look for it at the house. We were waiting at the door of the Court House with Arnost Lustig (IWP 70-72), the writer from Czechoslovakia. The girls came back with the ring. Paul grabbed the box, opened it, showed the ring to me: "Look, I kept it in the box." I laughed: "But you lost the box."

29. The Judge officiated the wedding while Paul held my hand tight. Arnost Lustig was Paul's witness, while the Chinese poet Cheng Chouyu, was mine. It was May 14, 1971.

30. Because of to the delay in looking for the wedding ring, the ceremony ran past the office hours. The secretary of the Court House had left. The Judge had to type the Certificate of Marriage himself. He had been Mary Engle's lawyer when Paul and Mary were divorcing. "Mrs. Engle," the Judge greeted me, and handed me the Marriage Certificate. "Congratulations."

31. "You are here!" Paul shouted with joy as we entered the hall of the Court House where my daughters and our friends were waiting. Paul sounded like he had just woken up to reality. The next day, May 15, we would have a reception. Paul said: "Now, I want to spend money on this occasion. After long suffering, we deserve a good wedding party and I want to invite everybody, let everybody know we are married."

32. On May 15, 1971, several hundred people came to the wedding party from Iowa City, Des Moines and Cedar Rapids. The children of the two writers, Arnost Lustig and Fernando Del Paso, had shut themselves up in a room to embroider a love poem they made up on a piece of linen, and kept it a secret, even from their parents. They presented it to us on the occasion. Drmola, the Czech director, put up a pantomime based on our lives. Lin Hwai-ming choreographed "The Dream of the Butterfly" and danced. It was one of the philosophical stories by the ancient philosopher Zhuang Zi. He dreamed that he was a butterfly. When he woke up, he did not know if it was the man Zhuang Zi dreaming of the butterfly, or the butterfly dreaming of Zhuang Zi. Angie Chen was sung a song she wrote. Everybody had kept all the practicing secret. It was an occasion celebrating two lives--two solitudes protecting, touching, greeting each other, as Rainer Maria Rilke had written.

33. When Paul and I decided to marry, I told my daughters. "Thank God!" Wei Wei said, "No more Miss Nieh, Miss Nieh!" Lan Lan said: "Mr. Engle will be a good father." Wei Wei said: "No more Mr. Engle, Mr. Engle. Let's call him Laodie." Paul asked what Laodie meant. I told him that it was Old Pa in Chinese, an affectionate way of addressing the father. Why "old"? Paul never caught the Chinese color. Chinese names were difficult for him. "Ah! How are

you?” Paul warmly greeted the other party on the phone. “Fine... Of course, I remember you...Are you in town?... Yes... We are very busy... We just came back from Easter Europe, Vienna, Paris... Nice to talk to you. Here's Hualing.” Then he covered the handset with both hands, whispered to me. “A Chinese woman. I don't know who she is.” I took over the phone. “Hello!” Then I laughed, laughed, and could not talk. It turned out to be a Chinese who had been in Iowa City many years and had been in the Engle house many times. To make it easier for Paul, I invented nicknames for the Chinese: there was Engineer Li, Princeton Lady, Woman Editor, Mongolian dancer, Stock Broker, Snail-Worm Scientist, Acupuncture Doctor, A Dish of Salt Owner, Painter Yao, Laughter Pan, Hong Kong Wang, Taiwan Chen, Shanghai Zhang, etc.

34. In the summer of 1971 we spent our honeymoon driving 6,000 miles from Iowa to California and back. We brought along our home-made food and beers in an ice-box, would stop off at a little town in the early evening, and picnic in the woods or by the water. We visited the Custer Battlefield, Yellowstone Park, Salt Lake City, Death Valley, ending up in Carmel, California, where we took this picture. The return drive was another way. The Grand Canyon was an awe-inspiring view. The sun was setting. It was misty. The colors of the Canyon were coming through the mist. The base was red, mixed, more or less, with grey, yellow and orange. We were saturated with the landscape. A woman was sitting on one of the rocks, weeping. A man, standing at distance, started to walk towards her. He looked like he was trying to talk her into something. She kept shaking her head, and weeping. We did not know what was going on. But the woman, the man, the Grand Canyon, provoked a vision of the human against timeless Nature.

35. Our home, the Deer Garden, is on the hill overlooking the Iowa River. Every day Paul would feed the deer with bird feed mixed with corn. He doted on a crippled fawn and called it Cripply. Whenever it stepped out of the woods in the back yard of our house, he would step out too, no matter rain or snow, with a full basin of deer feed, walk up the hill slope, calling: “Cripply, Cripply. My poor Cripply.”

36. The masks on the wall of our house came from many countries. They reminded us of the people they represented. Always the people. Okogbule Wonodi came to Iowa twice from Nigeria. He would sing Nigerian folk music accompanied by adrum. Gozo Yoshimasu, a Japanese poet, treated poetry reading as a form of art, the way he wrote poetry. Paul described his readings as “electrifying revelations of the power of poetry to move the heart and mind without the aid of translation.” Arifin Noer, an Indonesian playwright, wrote to Paul and me in January of 1991, 19 years after his stay here.

Dearest Paul and Hualing: I still keep in my mind our campus of the University of Iowa as a very special place. I always remember the EPB building where I got free coffee with very warm discussion with Sasha Petrove (Yugoslavia), Kijima (Japan), and Timothy Wang (Taiwan) and many other friends. How can I forget the beautiful wooden house of the Engles hidden by the trees on the hill on North Dubuque St.? I miss you both very, very much. Oh, yes, how are your two beautiful daughters? I always remember the sunset reflected on the river when Paul and I stood at your window. Paul,

you said to me, "Beautiful! Isn't it?" I said, "No. It is not! Everything is bad!" I was very homesick. You both were very, very kind. You are the power of love to prove that the people all over the world are the same. Because of you I have had my confidence as a writer.... It has been a very long time, 19 years. Oh God! Thanks, Paul. Thanks, Hualing. I don't know why I am so emotional this morning. Better I stop this love letter before it gets wet by my tears.

37. "This is the real Hualing," Paul said, pointing at the picture. I might look that way when I was alone in my study downstairs, writing, reading, lost in thoughts. Paul hand-made a long cream-colored desk for me, and had a yellow-chrysanthemum-colored carpet put there. It was my home within the Engle home. I worked alone in my study, content in knowing that Paul was there, in his study upstairs. Paul said: "Hualing, nothing makes me happier than for you to be happy. This is why I enjoy seeing you in your nice study. I know you're happy there writing with the Chinese characters. It makes me happy to know that you're there. It makes me also feel very secure."

38. Lan Lan is a dancer of modern dance. She has been teaching modern dance at the Connecticut College and is active in Sino-American cultural exchanges. Paul wrote a book:

VARIATIONS ON DANCE—

Dedicated to Lan Lan, herself a dance

*Light pours on the dancer its
Dazzle of pure devotion.
Dancer throws back to light
The meaning in her motion.*

39. Klaus Rupprecht came to the Law School of the University of Iowa from Germany with a Fulbright grant in 1967. He happened to take the same flight from Chicago to Iowa City with the German writer Hans Christopher Buch. Paul and I picked up Christopher at the airport and met Klaus by chance. Later Paul found this young man had no headcover for the cold Iowa winter. He gave him his beret. After earning his Ph.D at Tübingen University, Klaus joined the German foreign service while Wei Wei earned her Ph. D in Asian Studies at the University of Wisconsin. He and Wei Wei were married in 1974 in the Deer Garden, with Schubert's Trout Quartet played by the UI String Quartet. After the wedding Klaus made an announcement with a hand-made bronze bell from Poland: I want to thank my father-in-law for keeping me warm in the bitterly cold Iowa winter when I was a student away from home.

40. The moment Anthea, Lan Lan's daughter, was born in 1974, there was what the Chinese call "yuan," a mystic bond between Paul and the baby. Paul knew children's language from the experience of raising his own two daughters. Paul and Anthea would make rhymes together, creating a line in alternation. He enjoyed reading stories to her, and picking her up from school when her mother was busy with her teaching. One day, Anthea, then four years old, called, "Grandpa! Emergency!" "What happened?" Grandpa panicked. "No milk!" Paul

rushed milk to her up the steep icy drive. One afternoon in the summer of 1988, while feeding the deer, Paul fell in the backyard. Anthea was staying at a friend's house. Suddenly she felt driven by an impulse to see Grandpa. When she arrived, she found Grandpa lying in bed. They hugged and cried.

41. Chunghi Choo, the Korean-American artist, has been a dear friend of the Engles over three decades. She considers Paul “my American father.” She threw a party at her exquisite house she herself designed. The moment we stepped in, she shouted: “Paul, you are sexy!” Paul was wearing the white silk shirt I had made for him in Hong Kong, and beamed with joy at Chunghi’s welcome remark. She would come to us any time she had a problem, usually with a boyfriend. We would hear her before she entered the house, announcing: “I am coming!” One day, she went to our bedroom. (I still don’t know why she went there. Paul and I were in the sitting room.) She shouted: “Your bed is small! No! You must have a big bed! This bed is too small!” We went to join her in OUR bedroom. Paul said, amused: “We don’t need a big bed.” “You must have a big bed!” she protested. “You must! King size! Let’s go! The furniture store! Let’s go!” We persuaded her to let us have a Queen-size bed.

42. Chunghi Choo is obsessed by her sense of death. I have heard her talking about it over 30 years. “I will die. Yes, I will. Nobody will know it when I die. I’ve put it in my will: nobody, nobody should be informed. No! Nobody! My ashes will be scattered in the ocean.” “If nobody knows about your death, who would scatter your ashes in the ocean?” I asked. No answer. Anyway, I will have nothing to do with it since I am older than she. She is a genius artist, distinguished internationally for her work with metal. What she makes combines aesthetics, grace and joy with a touch of feminine sensuality. Some of her works are in the permanent collections of the great international art museums.

43 .The family picture was taken at the wedding of Lan Lan and Leo Lee 1987. It was one of the happiest moments of my life. They were married at the Engle house. I hired a man who cooked Chinese dishes in a huge wok in our backyard. It was snowing. The fire in the fireplace dancing up and down. Joking, laughing, drinking. It was such a festive occasion of unrestrained joy that the three-year-old Christoph, Wei Wei’s son, said loudly: I want to get married too.

44. Paul loved Christoph, calling him Little Man. The phone rang. Paul, addicted to the sound, rushed to answer. It was little Christoph calling from Los Angeles. Paul joked and laughed with him on the phone. When he hung up, he had tears in his eyes. “I never thought we would be so close. Christoph said, Grandpa, I miss you as big as the world.” At Lan Lan’s wedding, Paul held him up and asked him to beat the bell announcing dinner. It was one of the two bronze bells hand-made in Krakow, Poland. The first one was presented to Pope John Paul II. The second was given to the Engles by all the Polish writers who had been in the International Writing Program.

Parting

Paul and I stayed home in the Deer Garden on New Year's Eve, 1990. It was a freezing night. A fire was crackling cheerfully in the fire place. We sat quietly in front of the fire, each immersed in a book, and between us lay the XO Cognac that LanLan had brought back from Hong Kong for Paul, her "Old Pa."

At midnight, Paul poured me a glass and said: Hualing, may we be always healthy and happy. Let me say this again: Life with you is so good, few men have been so blessed. And, he smiled slyly--his own special wicked smile to trap the unsuspecting: Keep in mind what I'm going to say, he paused, and said: Your head is sexy, your body is wise.

It was the last New Year's Eve in the twenty-seven years we spent together.

During those twenty-seven years, Paul gave me the space to become what I am. He continually reminded me how thrilled he was to live with me, and that not one minute had ever been boring. We have endless things to talk about, countless things, big and small, to do together. Major concerns like our own writing and the International Writing Program that we had founded together. Minor interests like shopping for groceries. Paul had lived through the Great Depression of the thirties. I had also known hunger as a student wandering around during the eight years of the Anti-Japanese War. Nowadays we were always excited at the sight of fresh fruit, meat and veggies in the supermarkets, and happily throw them in bunches and packets into our shopping cart. Only those who had known hunger could experience that special delight. Together we would go to the post office to mail letters, to fashion stores to look at clothing. Paul had an eye for woman's clothes. Sometimes, as we walked down a street in New York, we would simultaneously point out a beautiful dress on display. Then I would try it on and he would foot the bill. Sometimes we would go together to a hardware store for hammers and nails. Paul loved carpentry. He repaired the balcony, the roof, the bookshelves and the chairs. He made me a cream-colored long desk, on which I am now writing this memoir. We would go to the green-house for flowers and plants, to the little grocery store kept by two Czech brothers to get the bread past the expiration date for the raccoons in our backyard. We would also get The New York Times in that little store—Paul would not subscribe for daily delivery only because he enjoyed chatting to the down-to-earth people in the store. Often as we drove up the hill towards our Deer Garden, he would say: I just love our home.

It was March 22, 1991. We were about to set off for a two months in Europe. We would first go to Bonn and get together with Weiwei's family. Paul couldn't wait to see our seven-year-old grandson Christoph. We also wished to see the newly united Berlin, and visit the Black Forest, where his ancestors were from. From there we would go to Warsaw and receive the Award for Cultural Exchange, the first of its kind granted by Lech Walesa's new government. Our friends in Prague were also expecting us. We would have an audience with President Havel. We would then head for Finland where writer friends were going to join us for a trip to the Baltic nations.

As we were about to leave at noon, I looked at the cypress vine and loose earth lying on the ground and said: Paul, we will be away for two months, why don't we get it planted.

Paul hurriedly planted the vine and then we left. Now the cypress vine is still twining itself yearningly on the window frame of the living room.

We left Iowa City and boarded the flight for Chicago.

Paul said: You look tired, rest your head on my shoulder.

I nestled against him, thinking to myself, it is so wonderful to lean on him, warmed by his body, feeling his breath.

It was the last time we clung to each other.

At the O'Hare Airport, we had to walk some distance for the connecting international flight. As we moved along the flow of human traffic, Paul suddenly discovered that he had lost his Irish cap. I had given it to him for Christmas, a wool cap of checkered red, green, grey, and blue, the kind he had

always wanted. Wearing it at a rakish angle, Paul looked cute, and so he thought. Now it was lost. He walked back and forth looking for it, cursing himself “Stupid, Stupid, I am going to find that cap.” Suddenly a man walked up and asked: Sir, is this your cap? He snatched the cap and held the man’s hand warmly, saying: Thank you, Thank you! To this day, that cap has been lying by my bedside.

When we reached the terminal, there was still a quarter of an hour before take-off for Frankfurt.

I’ll get Newsweek at the corner store, Paul said.

Be quick, we’re boarding. Leave your bag here, your cap, your jacket.

Sit down and catch your breath.

I won’t bother, we’ll be boarding right away.

And thus he left.

Time for boarding. All the other passengers boarded the plane. But no sight of Paul. I dragged our bags and went to look for him. Finally, at a bar near a new stand, I found him—lying on the floor. Two passengers were giving him CPR and blocked my view. But catching a glimpse of the brown shoes and grey blue trousers I knew it was my Paul. The airport medical team came over and tried to revive him. The ambulance arrived. They took us to the Resurrection Hospital, and made me stay in the waiting room. After about ten minutes, a doctor and a priest came out. Before they uttered a word, I knew that Paul was gone.

It was exactly 6:00 pm in the afternoon. A fierce rainstorm was pouring on Iowa.

Holding Paul’s cap that he had desperately tried to retrieve and the overcoat still lingering with the warmth of his body, I returned to Iowa City at midnight, alone.

Paul had been a constant traveler from one place to another, hurrying in the vortex of travelers on the crisscrossing paths, stopping off at a destination, starting out again with no waving goodbye, no looking back, but always with a vision ahead of the times. He died the way he had lived.

*

When I Die

Paul Engle

Don’t bring white kleenex, handkerchief and cry.
Send up red rockets to the sneering sky

On that most human and most simple day,
Shouting: Paul Engle's on his way.
Invite that bearded goat with the brass bell.
That bearded, barnyard he-goat with his brass bell
Who held his nose and bleated—Paul, you smell.

When hearing "Engle's dead," the flies in the warming air
Swarming.
Come shimmering.

(Unfinished, 1991)

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