

TRANSLATORS' INTRODUCTION

This is a unique collection of short stories that can also be read as a lyrical novel. Knitting all these childhood memories together into an impressive whole is the voice of a girl, Ying-tzu. It begins in the year 1926, when she is seven years old, and continues till she is thirteen. The progressive development of the stories runs parallel with the growth of the girl's understanding of life. Family events form the frame of the narrative, yet it is her keen observation of people and things around her that give it flesh and blood. The book was an instant success and has gone beyond its thirtieth printing since its first appearance in 1960.

Though the little girl's range of observation covers only the southern corner of the city, these stories have captured the readers' imagination. To many readers, it also seems that

what is most prominent is not only the characters, but that particular period of time and the vast metropolis of Peking, the fabulous capital of China.

The author is well known for her intuitive perception and quick witted humor, and both these qualities appear in all the stories. In “Hui-an Hostel,” the first story in this collection, Ying-tzu sounds uncertain, her groping perception shadowed by a feeling of bewilderment. This bewilderment appears again in “Let Us Go and See the Sea,” a story based on the delicate line between innocence and guilt, and the difficulty for a child to fully apprehend the fine line dividing “the bad” from “the good.” In “Lan I-niang,” Ying-tzu becomes more aware of the undercurrents within the relationships of the adult world and precociously manipulates events to protect her mother. “Donkey Rolls” is the only story in which the main character is not the child but Sung Ma, the illiterate wet nurse who appears in all the five stories with an earthy wisdom and dignity all her own.

In the afterword of her last and newest Chinese edition (1988) of this collection, the author herself says, “At the end of every story, the person I cared for would leave me, until in the last one, ‘Papa’s Flowers Have Fallen,’ even my beloved father left us.” It is the impact of this constant loss that arouses the child’s awareness of the uncertainties of human relationships, even of life itself, catapulting the child away from childhood joys into the sorrows of the adult world.

Lin Hai-yin, one of the foremost women writers in Taiwan, is the daughter of a native of Miaoli, a city in the center

of the island. She grew up in the great city of Peking and has considered it her second home. In the winter of 1948, she returned to Taiwan and has been pursuing a successful career as a writer and publisher. Her creative works include many volumes of essays, three novels, and four collections of short stories. Without her official consent, *Memories of Peking: South Side Stories* was made into a movie in Shanghai in 1982, and has won quite a few prizes in international competitions. (The name of the movie is *Memories of Beijing*.)

This collection has been a cooperative venture by the two translators. The primary division of labor was as follows: Nancy C. Ing translated "Winter Sun, Childhood Years, the Camel Caravan," "Hui-an Hostel," "Let Us Go and See the Sea" and "Lan I-niang"; Chi Pang-yuan translated "Donkey Rolls" and "Papa's Flowers Have Fallen."

We wish to express our sincere appreciation to Mr. Charles Fosselman for his suggestions and editorial advice.

We are indeed happy to be able to present the English version of *Memories of Peking: South Side Stories*, for we truly feel this book is not only an outstanding achievement in the Chinese literary world, but also a sensitive insight into a traditional Chinese family and society of the past that may never be recaptured again.

Taipei, 1989