

2 Bai Wei

(1894–1987)

Bai Wei was born Huang Zhang in Zixing county, Hunan province in 1894 (she adopted the pen name Bai Wei after moving to Japan in 1918). As a young girl she attended the school run by her father, a keen supporter of the late Qing social reform movement. For all his enlightened views, however, he insisted that his daughter heed social convention, so in 1910 she was forced into an arranged marriage. Bai Wei endured the harsh tyranny of an abusive mother-in-law for six years before running away to enroll at the Third Normal School for Girls in Hengyang. Later, having been expelled for political activities, she transferred to the First Normal School for Girls in Changsha. In 1918, shortly before she was due to graduate, she outwitted her father and the school authorities by sneaking off the campus grounds via an old sewage duct, after which she made her way to Shanghai and bought passage to Japan. On her arrival, she was virtually penniless and had no choice but to take on menial work as a domestic servant in the home of British missionaries. Demeaning as she found this to be, the circumstances were nevertheless preferable to returning to live at her husband's house. Eventually she was awarded a scholarship at the Tokyo Higher Normal School for Women, where she would study biology. During this time she also became acquainted with the young playwright Tian Han (1898–1968), who tutored her in English and introduced her to the work of the Norwegian author Henrik Ibsen.

Bai Wei started writing while living in Japan in the early 1920s, with such dramas as *Sophie* and *Miss Linli*. The publication of the latter, a three-act romantic tragedy, by the Shanghai Commercial Press in 1925 won her wide critical acclaim back in China. A number of female authors in the May Fourth period had taken to experimenting with modern dramatic forms, but this work was hailed as an exceptional achievement. Critic Chen Xiying went so far as to rank it among the top creative masterpieces of modern Chinese literature, lavish praise that no doubt helped

secure Bai Wei's reputation as one of the most prominent female literary figures of her day.

In 1926, with revolutionary fervor on the rise back home, Bai Wei gave up her fellowship for graduate study to return to China, where she took a position as a translator for the Wuhan Revolutionary Government while teaching part-time at Zhongshan University. This arrangement did not last long, however, and following the breakdown of the coalition between Nationalist and Communist forces, she moved in with the poet Yang Sao in Shanghai. That same year saw the publication of *Fighting out of the Dark Pagoda of Spirits*, a three-act play, as well as her first full-length novel, *A Bomb and an Expeditionary Bird*, both of which first appeared in serial form in *Torrents* magazine, the leftist journal edited by Lu Xun and Yu Dafu. Later they were issued as single volumes. Both works are set against the contemporary backdrop of national revolution and thematize the interconnectedness of women's domestic subjugation and China's social and economic turmoil. By the early 1930s, Bai Wei had emerged as an important figure in the literary left, joining the League of Left-Wing Writers and taking part in activist drama circles. She was among the first practitioners of the new resistance literature that emerged after the Mukden Incident on September 18, 1931, publishing such patriotic plays as *A Certain Stop on Beining Road* in *Big Dipper* magazine.

Quite aside from the brewing national crisis, these were not easy times for Bai Wei personally: she was not only financially strapped (so desperate, in fact, that despite their now deeply strained relationship, she and Yang Sao copublished a collection of love letters, *Last Night*) but also plagued by increasingly serious physical ailments stemming from a prolonged battle with venereal disease. The reportage sketches translated here, "Third-Class Hospital Ward" (1936), were composed during one of her many hospitalizations in this difficult stage of her life. The excerpts are drawn from a five-part series Bai Wei wrote for *Women's Life* magazine, and reveal the author's keen awareness of the complex intersection of poverty and sexual politics.

Disease figures prominently in Bai Wei's best-known literary project of the 1930s, her voluminous autobiographical novel *My Tragic Life*, which was published in 1936. Described in the foreword as a story about "Nora" after she leaves home, it spares no detail in candidly describing the devastation venereal disease has wrought on the heroine's body and her life. While some critics found the work overly self-absorbed, it

evidently struck a powerful chord with contemporary female audiences. Shen Zijiu, editor of *Women's Life*, was inundated with letters of support from sympathetic readers after the novel's publication and consequently issued a public letter to solicit donations for Bai Wei's mounting medical bills. Money poured in from fans of her work inside and outside China, enabling her to pursue further treatment.

Despite her condition, Bai Wei journeyed to Wuhan to join the Chinese Writers' Antiaggression Association after the Japanese invasion and supported herself by working as a special correspondent for *Xinhua Daily*. Her requests to visit the Communist base at Yan'an were reportedly denied on grounds of her ill health, but she would show her support for the CCP by engaging in propaganda work for Communist guerrilla forces in the Jiangnan region during the civil war in the late forties.

In the postliberation era, Bai Wei joined the newly founded Chinese Writers' Association in Beijing but for all intents and purposes gave up creative writing. Instead, she volunteered for service in the Great Northern Wilderness (*Beidahuang*), and later worked in the remote northwestern province of Xinjiang. She returned to Beijing in the early sixties, at which time her formal application for party membership was rejected, despite her seemingly impeccable revolutionary credentials. Like many veteran intellectuals and artists, she was persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, and on one occasion was beaten so severely by Red Guards that she was left partially crippled. Besides a few poems, Bai Wei published little during the Maoist period. She died in 1987.

Third-Class Hospital Ward

(1936)

AFTER BEING SICK for two weeks, cradling my aching belly, in such pain I could barely breathe and bracing myself on the furniture as I inched along, I threw together a few simple belongings and had my new maid take me to the hospital.

I registered at Outpatient Services, as the sweltering September sun beat down on the patients waiting in the courtyard to go in to the doctor. When the nurse who came to take my temperature noticed I was in such agony that I couldn't

even raise my head, she sighed with a look of sympathy on her face. "Ai, you always put it off until you're this sick before coming to see the doctor!"

I had come to this hospital for treatment on a number of occasions over the last few years, so she recognized me. She ushered me inside to a consulting room and cheerfully instructed me to undress.

The doctor knew me well too, as though I were an old patron, and seeing me shuffle in all hunched over, holding my stomach, he exclaimed in shock:

"Aiya! You can't even walk anymore?"

Once he had inquired about this, that, and the other, the upshot was that I was to be hospitalized. I showered in the steamy washroom, then followed a hospital attendant to the third-class medical ward.

"Oh, you're back!" a fat woman cried out in surprise from her bed, looking at me with a smile.

"I know, what rotten luck!" I replied as I walked over.

"There's no two ways about it, getting sick is awful! Last time we were both checked in here as patients, no sooner had I recovered and left the hospital than I got sick all over again," said the woman.

The nurse told me to take bed number one, so I bore the pain and had a few words with the fat woman in bed number two.

One hour, two hours, three hours, I dozed quietly in pain and unattended, the groans of the critically ill patients in the ward and the chatter and laughter of the not-so-sick droning on and on. . . .

The plump female doctor Dr. Yang came to examine me and inquired, "When were you admitted?"

"Eleven o'clock this morning."

"That was hours ago, and no one's been here to see you?"

"No."

"They must be out of their minds! Admitting a patient so long ago, and nobody even came to inform me!"

What Dr. Yang said made perfect sense to me: perfunctory is the only way to characterize how patients in the third-class medical ward are treated in big hospitals like this. But for someone with a serious illness, think how nerve-racking the wait can be, and how much worse their condition gets in the meantime. After that doctors streamed in, one after the next, some really keen to treat me, others who simply regarded patients like me as objects to experiment on.

At dusk, the patient in bed number five got dressed to get ready to be discharged. Her husband hurried her along with a scowl on his face, but she wouldn't leave until the doctor came to have a word with her, so she dawdled

over her clothes and her hair until he finally appeared, none too happy, and asked:

"You had something to say to me?"

"Doctor, I'm checking out. Is there anything I should avoid eating?"

The doctor feigned a serious expression and replied, "Anything's fine except opium."

The ward erupted in laughter.

"What a funny response." From all the laughter, I surmised that the woman had attempted suicide by swallowing opium, and when I looked back over, she was standing there woodenly, absolutely mortified. All eyes were fixed on her as if to say, "You fool!"

My condition got worse with each passing hour and day; it hurt so much that I tossed and turned in bed, sweating so profusely that I drenched several changes of clothing a day, but I bore the pain without so much as a moan or a whimper, so quiet it was as though I weren't sick at all. The groans and cries, the chatter and laughter in the ward; the various shapes and shadows of the doctors and nurses passing back and forth—it was as though my ears and eyes had been made just to take this all in. My senses, my intellect, my emotions had been deadened by the intense pain.

In the middle of the night, the insane patient in the next room kept screaming: "Ow . . . dear mother!"

And all throughout the night, the fat woman would groan, "Oh, how it hurts."

The buzzing of mosquitos, the batting of the fans, mingled with the faint groans and sighs, the agonizing wails of the dying tuberculosis patients, shouts for the attendant and the nurses, the sound of pissing, the summer breeze outside the window rustling through the leaves on the trees . . . not a single one of these sounds escaped my ears, and for four whole nights I couldn't sleep a wink, though I did not utter a sound.

The days sped by. I lost consciousness twice and I underwent an unsuccessful surgery. I was completely incapacitated and devoid of thought. All I had were my eyes and ears to take in the sights and sounds of the ward.

HOSPITAL BEDS LINED both sides of the ward, their white curtains drawn back at right angles, forming three-dimensional squares like the stage for a puppet show.

The patients were like living puppets, moving simultaneously on display between the curtains. Some were stretched out on their backs; others lay on

their sides; some sat up, with the faintest murmur of moans and groans, bodies either half stripped or stark naked, letting the attentive nurses bathe them.

In front of each bed was a washbasin filled halfway with water, and the nurses helped to wash and dry off the sick. Sounds of splashing water, *xi-xi sha-sha*, *dong-dong ding-ding*; white towels one after another scrubbing and scrubbing emaciated bodies, from the shoulders down to the feet; white sheets flying up and over, swift change of white clothing; nurses all in white, bustling about cheerfully with their altruistic spirits.

It was as intense as if a mobilization order had been issued, as disciplined as the military. Each patient, either by themselves or with the help of a nurse, would be sponged down and given fresh clothes, the sounds of splashing water mingling with moans and groans. Outside the window, the breeze, the birds chirping, the shade of the trees, and the palm leaves no longer entered the picture.

Dressed all in red, Miss Deng, from the ophthalmology ward, waltzed in with her chin up high and her chest out to visit her sick friend Miss Guo, and upon seeing this scene exclaimed:

"My, what a pity I am not an artist, otherwise I would paint this erotic picture!"

Together with the patient next to them, they turned their conversation about the sponge baths to the Imperial Concubine getting in the pool.¹ In my opinion, there was nothing picturesque about it, but it was a great image. Thus prompted, I felt there was much to write about the women's third-class ward, none of which could be separated from "women" and "class."

I. Beautiful Woman Born Under an Unlucky Star

AS I RECALL, she was the patient in bed number three. She had a beautiful face and a pointed nose, lovely brows and thin but curvy lips, an exquisite pale complexion, and a frail physique—these were her distinguishing features.

When a burly policeman came to deliver a message from her husband, it was obvious from her simple conversation with him that she was a gentle and well-mannered person. The attendant peered over at the beautiful woman with great admiration, hanging on every word she said. After the policeman left, waves of grief enveloped the woman as she covered her face with her hands and sobbed.

¹Reference to the famous legend of the beautiful imperial concubine Yang Guifei and Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang dynasty (618–907).

The fat lady, the kindest soul on the ward, asked with a look of compassion, "Why are you crying?"

"They want me to go home tomorrow, but I am not well yet, and I'll have to face that brute every day again!"

She said this choking back her tears, and used the corner of her hospital gown to wipe them away, then sighed as though she had unknown worries.

"Don't be sad, stay here a few days longer until you feel better."

"How can I? My old man already sent someone here twice to fetch me, and he's set on having me go home tomorrow."

"But if you haven't fully recovered, how can he insist?"

"Oh, *nainai*, I'm not as fortunate as the rest of you! I am staying here for free. . . ."

Up until this point she had been sobbing, but suddenly she grew self-conscious and lowered her head, as though she feared to show her distress, and just sat there in embarrassed silence. The fat lady leaned over to console her.

"That doesn't matter, this hospital often does good deeds. Lots of folks get treated here free of charge. And the doctors here are excellent. You should talk to your husband and tell him to wait until you're all better."

"You don't understand, *nainai*, my old man works for the railroad, and the only reason I got hospitalized in the first place was because of help from my relatives who also work there. Now that my man had someone sent over to get me, how can I refuse? Still, going home in this condition is too much. Whenever my man gets a little cash in his pocket, all he does is go out boozing and gambling, and once he's liquored up and broke, he comes back home and takes it out on me. He's smacked me around me in broad daylight, at night, when I was pregnant, and after my delivery. We've been married eight years, and for eight years I've taken his beating."

"Oh my, you really have had it bad!"

"Poor me, ever since I married him, I haven't had more than three or four months of peaceful sleep in his bed—when he wants me he just yanks me over, and when he's had enough he just kicks me onto the floor . . . so I always sleep on two benches in the corner. After I had my baby I slept on a door plank that made my entire body sore. . . ."

Meanwhile, the tuberculosis patients across from them had been chattering away—how splendid it was to summer in Qingdao, how wonderful the cuisine was, how much Jesus loves mankind. And the arrogant obstetrics student in the bed opposite, a typical "modern" wife, was going on about the New Life movement. Somehow that poor woman and the fat lady digressed onto

the topic of clothes, and the woman pulled out an article of clothing from the small cupboard at the head of the bed to show the fat lady.

"Just look at this, other people wouldn't even use it for rags. But these past years it's all I've had, summer, spring, fall, and winter. When I wash it I have nothing else to wear the next day, so I just put it on the stove to dry. My baby froze to death because it had nothing to wear. Once, I secretly got a job as a wet nurse so I could make some clothes for me and my baby, but my man wouldn't have it and came and dragged me home and gave me a beating.

"At home, I'm either starving or freezing cold. Just think, if this is what I wear when it's hot, you can imagine how unbearable it gets in the winter. Other people's maidservants dress better than this, so all these years I've wanted to find work as a maid, and once I even snuck out. But again he found me and gave me such a thrashing that a few days later I had a miscarriage, and I've been poorly ever since. But he still beats me, sometimes until I'm black and blue. Oh, what misery! How can I go on?"

She got so choked up she could hardly speak, and the fat lady didn't know what to do to console her.

The next day, just as the ward was abuzz with people getting ready to be discharged, the fellow who appeared to be a policeman returned. The clueless attendant threw admiring glances at the pair, and attentively went over to ask:

"Are you being discharged? Do you want to settle your bill . . ."

Within a quarter of an hour, the man had returned from handling the bill, but the woman was still sitting there on the bed listlessly, without having gotten dressed. From outside came a gruff shout: "The car's here!"

Mortified to the point of tears, the woman took off her white hospital gown and with nimble fingers put on her own threadbare clothing, and with deeply furrowed brows slowly climbed down off the bed. A mean-looking fellow strode in and bellowed: "Get a move on!"

He didn't show her the slightest bit of affection or courtesy but instead just grabbed her belongings and left. Seeing the true nature of the couple, the attendant who had previously been so ingratiating now put on a contemptuous air and walked away.

"Hurry it up!" Again came a gruff shout from outside, and the one who looked like a policeman seemed afraid to accompany the woman, so he rushed out ahead of her, saying, "Hurry! At four-thirty the car has to be someplace else."

The woman left behind limped along unsteadily, her face in pain, and all eyes fixed on her as though she were an old beggar. Her yellowed shirt was

patched in a dozen places, while her tattered black trousers, faded from washing, barely covered her knees, and you could see her toes poking through her worn-out shoes. Such beauty concealed beneath an outfit like this was as pathetic as a winter flower encased in ice and snow. She hobbled slowly across the ward, and only after quite some time did she reach the exit, where she steadied herself against the door and the wall, clearly unable to move any farther. She called out, "Attendant, please go outside and tell the car to pull up closer to the courtyard!"

The attendant glared at her with an arrogant, icy look, and replied disdainfully, "I'm busy."

With that, she strode by, assisting other patients with their belongings. The woman was like a squashed caterpillar, wounded; her neck recoiled and her face filled with humiliation and anguish as she slumped against the doorway, crestfallen. The nurses passing back and forth ignored her, and the attendant, all smiles, accepted tips from the other patients being discharged, and respectfully helped them out with their luggage. Tears glistened in the woman's eyes as she had no choice but again to call out, "Attendant, thank you kindly, while you are outside could you tell my car to pull up here?"

"Humph! Car! . . . I wouldn't know anything about that!"

With an especially sarcastic, disdainful tone of voice and a cross expression, she swaggered past. It was as though the woman's spirit had been crushed. Offended and indignant, she emerged from the corner of the ward. She inspected her own clothes and her toes poking through her shoes and sobbed with tears gushing, as all eyes, with looks of both contempt and pity, converged into one sharp angle onto her sad face.

Meanwhile, I was lying immobile in the bed by the entrance, gasping for breath. I found the scene incredibly upsetting, and in my heart I lamented, "Even in the third-class medical ward there are classes! And these are indeed classes within a class. . . ."

IV. *Lost Youth*

. . . SHE AND I had been acquainted for a couple of days. Ever since I'd been on the mend, I had taken to strolling up and down the corridor here, and on one occasion I sat down on a bench with her and we'd gotten to talking about all sorts of things. She was married to the manager of a steamboat company who in his earlier years had been a big shot in the business world.

The older woman beckoned her over, and she approached beaming, delicate and exquisite, just like an oriole flitting about in the trees. The married woman

explained that I wanted to talk with her, so she was kind enough to sit down and we made some idle chitchat until we got on the subject of being ill.

"You've had three operations here?"

"Yes, unfortunately!"

"What is your condition?"

I knew what her ailment was, but I couldn't very well say it outright, so I asked her this way on purpose. She laughed and replied candidly, "Oh . . . how shall I put it? . . . You could call it a marital disease."

The rest of us started laughing.

"What are you laughing about?" Her eyes widened as she looked at the three of us nervously, then rapped the nurse on the shoulder with her fist and said, "If I hadn't gotten married, I never would have contracted a nasty disease like this."

I found her innocence and honesty far more appealing than the efforts the elder matron made to cover her condition up.

"Is it gonorrhea?"

"Exactly. Advanced gonorrhea."

"Me too. The doctors have been advising me to have surgery for a long time now, so I thought I would ask you about your experience."

"Oh. Once you catch this wretched disease it ruins your reproductive organs, and it's agony whether you have the operation or not. Women really have the worst luck."

She sighed and looked at me sympathetically before continuing:

"Before I got married, I had lots of suitors and even fell in love a few times myself, though they were just youthful crushes. When it came to sex, I always felt that it was something that defiled a young woman's beauty. Who would have known that within a month of getting married I would start getting severe stomachaches? One day I had eaten some crabs, and that night I got this strange cramp. By daybreak it felt like my stomach was in knots. I was sweating and aching and had difficulty breathing, so at dawn I drove to Baolong Hospital, where they diagnosed it as acute appendicitis that had to be operated on immediately—"

"This time the doctors also told me it was chronic appendicitis, since my right side hurt," I interrupted.

"My right side really ached too, and after the operation I was in high spirits, but then to my surprise the doctors kept coming in one after the next, asking if I had gonorrhea. I said I did not, but they determined otherwise, and when my family consulted with the doctors they were told the strain was really virulent and had the doctors known this beforehand, they would not have per-

formed the operation. I fainted from the shock. When I came to I asked my husband if he was infected, but he shook his head. At the time, my family and friends and his mother all heard him, and so they gave me strange looks as if I were a loose girl with no morals. I fainted out of anger and was unconscious for five or six days. On the seventh day, the incision split open and there was pus and blood, and the more they tried to fix it the more infected it got and my lower body hurt terribly; at the time, I just wanted to die. . . .

"After I was discharged from the hospital, the gynecologists I saw all said that the bacteria from the gonorrhea had damaged my ovaries, and that I would need surgery. But my mother and the rest of the family were opposed to me having another operation. After that I got pregnant, and throughout my entire pregnancy the ovaries on both sides hurt something awful. I also came to realize what a philanderer my husband really was. I was filled with such regret—a girl from a humble family like me should not have married a rich man. Later, when my baby was born, it was not just tiny but also blind in both eyes. And as for my husband, he would constantly flirt with my younger sister, and they were always doing all sorts of revolting things right in front of me. Once I got so mad I fainted. Even though they brought me back to life, that time I fell dangerously ill.

"My mother was afraid I wouldn't recover. For fear of losing her cash cow, she openly forced my sister to get involved with my husband and spend the night with him at a hotel, just waiting for me to die so she could marry my sister off to him."

Hearing this, we were all shocked, and the older married woman proclaimed loudly:

"Oh! . . . How could your own mother be so cruel?"

"My husband was really rich back then, and had I died, can you blame her for being reluctant to part with such a money tree?"

With indignation in our voices, we discussed this for quite a while; the young woman shook her charming head and body slightly and, as if reciting a lesson she knew by heart, went on talking of her disease:

"As a result of this, the shock was so great that I nearly went out of my mind, but I knew that I had to be completely cured of the disease or I'd never be free of this tragedy, so I made up my mind to have the operation. My husband discovered his conscience and admitted to me that he had suffered from the disease for many years. As a gesture of repentance, he agreed to give my sister ¥50,000 and end his relationship with her once I was completely cured. Luckily the first operation went smoothly, and the doctor said that since I was young he left in one ovary. However, that remaining ovary often troubled me

and felt uncomfortable whenever it became inflamed. Whenever I got upset, I'd blow up and lose my temper. I also found out that while my husband had supposedly paid off my sister and severed relations with her, in fact they were still having an affair, and on top of that my sister was not only a tease but was also jealous and brazen, and regarded me with contempt. Finally I got so depressed that I was going insane, and the second time I came in for surgery everyone treated me like a madwoman.

"The truth was, I wasn't really insane at all; my mind was very lucid, though I did have a terrible temper and whenever my husband wasn't nice to me I would blow my top and have a spectacular row with him. Even I knew it wasn't appropriate. All I wanted was to suppress my temper and stop making everyone unhappy, but it was futile—as soon as the anger came, I would lose my resolve. I used to be gentle and mild-mannered, I didn't know how I got like this. Later I asked a doctor, who told me that generally hysteria is quite severe in women with diseased uteruses and ovaries. And in the worst cases, it can easily turn into mental disease. So the year before my second surgery, practically everyone thought I was insane, and on that pretext my husband wanted to leave me. Fortunately, the doctor said that I'd be better once I had the operation, so I had no choice but to come back to do it.

"During the second surgery do you know what they removed?"

"They took out the bad ovary."

"With both gone, isn't that tantamount to being neutered?"

"Exactly! Because I was still young, the doctors left a small section of the ovary so it would continue to function. But afterward it was worse than being crazy."

"How's that?" the married woman asked.

"For more than a year I felt no emotion; it was as though I were a wooden puppet. Whether it was a happy occasion or a sad occasion, nothing could excite me. Even when my husband was intimate with me, I felt like a stone; in short, I was completely frigid. Even if my beloved mother had died right in front of me, I would have been incapable of grieving or crying. At the time, I thought, what's the point of living like a block of wood? I was done! Done! I'd have been better off dead. . . ."

Brimming with emotion, she shook her head and leaned over as if she were seeing scenes of the past. It reminded me of something a friend had said to me few years back:

"In my opinion, you'd be better off having surgery. Even if ovaries are the treasure of female youth, now that they're unhealthy, there's no point leaving them inside your body. All your suffering is futile, for if they develop an

infection that spreads to other parts of your body, you could get peritonitis, and that could be fatal. If you have them removed and forego your youth, you will have spared your life. And if your youth is gone and you can't do anything creative, you can always go work in a cotton mill, spinning year in and year out; you could spin your whole life and become a revolutionary woman through and through."

As I recalled the last few things she had said, I looked back over at the poor young woman and simply didn't know what else to say to her. I brooded over what my past had been like after I caught this wretched disease. As for my future, did it hold any more promise than hers?

The young woman unhurriedly spoke of her terrifying state of mind after losing her youth. Then she mentioned the infection that brought her here for surgery on this occasion. She looked over at the married woman with a gloomy expression and said:

"Perhaps this time I'll be like you and they'll take everything out—my ovaries, uterus, and fallopian tubes. Otherwise, why haven't the doctors told me what they're removing? Alas, I am only twenty-seven years old, and I'm not ready to turn into an old woman. Had I known it would be like this, I never would have gotten married! I hate my husband for giving me this deadly disease!"

As she sighed in sorrow, the tears glistening in her eyes reflected the rays of light from the sunset filtering through the trees. From a window in the corridor a nurse shouted out that it was time for our medication, so we each went back to our own wards.

MIDNIGHT. THE PATIENTS on the ward are deep in slumber; a still night, a forlorn heart. I hoped that my present illness was unrelated to that damned disease, otherwise I would soon become the third of them, a creature that was neither female nor male.

Farewell, third-class medical ward. I was again wheeled into the operating room. The doctors and nurses put me into the fetal position and administered a shot of anesthesia in my back, then straightened me out flat and made the first incision in my abdomen. Then came the clanging of forceps as each of the three doctors swiftly snipped and cut; ten minutes went by, and then they sewed me back up with great big stitches and the doctors left, leaving me on the operating table.

Half an hour later, they returned, made another quick and somewhat larger

incision, with the rapid clinking of forceps and scalpels; they lifted out my intestines and guts, snipping, cutting, ripping, chopping, now so careful they held their breath, now chuckling away:

"Miss, you've got the most peculiar appendix, nothing like other peoples'."

"Ai, what a nuisance, this is really hard to cut."

"Are you married or single?"

"All that's over now, just call me by my first name."

"Your period must be very uncomfortable, no?"

"Oh . . ."

I felt as though I were being operated on without anesthesia, that's how much it hurt, and I couldn't answer anymore but just strained to breathe and bear the pain.

"Calm your breathing! Relax your stomach! Otherwise, we can't do our job!"

Scalpels quickened, prodding and pulling. I nearly fainted and moaned softly in agony.

"Hey, are you really in pain or are you just being a baby for our sakes?" the doctor teased me.

"Hurry up! If you're going to take your time like this, then remove this cover from my eyes and set up a reflector so I can see what you are operating on."

The anesthesia seemed to have worn off completely, but despite the pain I laughed and chatted as though nothing were happening. An hour later, they stitched me back up and wheeled me back to the third-class ward with the female workers with broken hands and cracked skulls, maids with opened bellies and throats, gunshot victims, and those wasting away from consumption.

These were warriors suffering from physical ailments: the critically ill who rarely uttered a sound; the mildly ill who clamored on; the missionary ladies like ants swarming around something rotten, encircling the patients, singing and preaching; the medicine cart rattling by; the cries and hollers when it came time to change bandages; the sloshing of bathwater being poured late at night before even the first light of dawn had spilled out; on one side, the clatter of eating utensils and glasses; on the other side, the whirl of someone urinating.

The attendant still fawns all over those with money while ignoring the poor, and she even said to my maid, "Since she doesn't have a man, who in this hospital is going to pay her bill?"

There is still a great deal worth reporting about the third-class ward, but I have written too much and will stop here.