

Taiwan Trilogy

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BEAUTIFUL MEINUNG

THERE ARE HARDLY WORDS TO DESCRIBE the rice farmer I rode past on my way to Meinung, my pedal squeaking with every half turn. I decided to rest for a moment, Elder Tsai far ahead of me, and to observe this curious figure. Deeper brown than most Chinese, his skin matched the dark paties in which he toiled. He walked the narrow paths between rice stalks, inspecting his work in preparation for the upcoming harvest. He was a lone figure in an Oriental painting, his gait heavy and bent. The tool he carried stretched both arms out from his shoulders like a cross. He was another of those with whom we would probably never speak—one of the many, Tsai said, who would pass away in the darkness of traditional spiritualism. I saw my companion waiting for me on the road ahead, and started pedalling again toward Meinung.

Our morning had begun with study of the Old Testament. My native companion read to me verses in Chinese, and I followed the ancient characters trying to memorize as I listened. We then picked a hymn to sing and chanted it as best we could. Our prayers were sincere that we might somehow inspire the small community of Saints in our area. Another prayer before we left asked for guidance in finding those searching for the truth we had to offer.

The lamp of the sun goddess was already high when we emerged from our door. Her rays were bright, but never warm enough to take away the chill from our snowless winter mornings. We dressed in dark sweaters and patched woolen gloves which made the wind bearable when riding our bicycles. I strapped my Bible to the rear rack with an old rubber tire, and we started for Meinung.

Meinung, which means "beautiful farm," is a village known for its surrounding scenes and inner temples. Here the worship of the earth god was most active. Sounds from the Madzu temple could be heard for miles: cymbals and loud drums echoed with wailing music and heavy chants. Nuns came from the mountains to worship and to take fruit and other gifts offered to the gods. Their heads were completely shaved, their

robes made of dark plain material, and their slippers plain and unattractive. They spent their days in the mountain convents, followers of Buddha. The oldest nuns wore black and had three round burn marks on their shaved foreheads. The others in dark gray followed in groups of twos and threes. They walked solemnly, and drew respect from the common people. I once saw a gray nun wearing eye glasses, and realized for the first time that she was once a woman, a daughter of good parents, a schoolgirl who played and laughed with friends and family.

Meinung was smaller than Chishan where we lived, but even from our distance we could hear the sounds of the morning market. We locked our bikes near the town's only stoplight, then walked through the back alleys to where we could buy food and talk with some local people. The poorer sellers squatted in front of the market, their vegetables laid out on the street in front of them. Others owned shops and displayed their goods in large baskets and metal tins. The stench of rotting pork vented from behind the shops. Dangling light bulbs gathered flies to huge slabs of fat and meat. Intestines and whole heads, the delicacies of pork, were suspended from hooks above us. I waited for my companion to banter with sellers while watching a man clean live eels. I felt weak in these moist caves and breathed little until we went outside. My companion did not buy anything, and we decided to pick up our vegetables when we returned to Chishan.

We spoke to no one else as we left the market. I could see the frustration on Tsai's face and in his walk as we headed for our bicycles. He had been in Chishan for several months and already lost any desire to spread Christianity among the poorer classes. I think he was reminded of his own father, a fish salesman, and felt the pain of being cut off from his family for not participating in the worship of his ancestors. He refused to share the message with any like his father who had already rejected it. He walked quickly past the older farm women in front and avoided any calls to buy fresh cabbage or dried squid. We passed a man crawling up the grimy alleyway selling incense. He had no legs. Tsai grimaced in frustration, visibly battling sympathy, then continued walking.

I did not speak much when I was with Tsai. My words were often incorrect, my sentences slow, and anything said to anyone could be better phrased by this Chinese native. If ever he spoke to me it was in broken English, and then only to clarify an English word or phrase. He was learning English, and if nothing else in these two years he would return home with that. I walked and rode behind him, and had time to think, to watch, to enjoy the beauty of the surrounding landscape. We reached our bicycles at the end of the alley, and I again strapped my scriptures to the back. Tsai paused for a moment without words, then rode off and I quickly followed.

I was surprised to see my companion stop his bicycle across from a temple. At this close distance the noise from the front courtyard was almost unbearable, and the sights and smells were strange to my American eye. He got off and started to lock his bike to a post. All eyes were upon us, and even the music seemed to slow a bit as my companion's intentions became clear. Everyone in Meinung had seen us before, almost all had met us, and an even smaller number wanted anything to do with us. I was as shocked as they to see that we were going to enter the temple. "Stay with me," he said.

The temple was, of course, a public place. Yet it was hardly common for two young men in white shirts and tags bearing the name of Jesus Christ to enter. I felt my companion's determination to find one of these dark worshippers whom he could speak to, to quarrel with even. It was not my style to argue, but I had stood by as Tsai had done it many times before. We took our Bibles and crossed the crowded street, both of us fearless, one innocent and the other brave.

The temples are large halls elaborately designed and covered in black and red. Gold and other colors are less common, but they stand out in the darkness. Red pillars and tiles surround the main entrance, and black carved wood adorns the outside walls—dragons and mythical animals, and the faces of ancient gods and heroes. For a Westerner, especially a Christian, temples can seem eerie places: public houses of burning and idol worship. The floors are covered in ashes, and pots of incense smoke in every room. We entered this scene slowly, and watched as people knelt at the altars.

Fresh fruits, meats, and breads of every kind were laid out on a table just above the kneeling people. Tsai passed through this main area and headed for the smaller rooms in the back, probably where he could find someone alone. I stopped and backed up against a pillar to watch the sight before me. The smallest woman I had ever seen came before the table and set down a shiny grapefruit among the other foods. She then took a stick of incense and placed it in the charcoaled brass urn. Slowly she knelt down, then completely prostrated her feeble body before the gods. I stood aside in the darkness and could hardly move.

Hundreds of wooden icons covered the altar shelves above the sacrificial offerings. Some were of calm Oriental figures holding leaves and other symbols of peace. Most of the statues were dark, sinister-looking faces which evoked fear in the worshippers. On the outer edges were again the mythical animals and gargoyles who screamed out in protection of the gods. I heard firecrackers in the street, and shivered as I backed around into a smaller room.

There, in one of the side rooms, was a nun in peaceful supplication on her knees. What she looked up to was a painting of a war scene, and a

single stick of incense burning in front. She did not turn toward me, nor did she seem to notice that I had entered. I watched her, staring down at her bare head and the wooden beads in her hands. She rolled each bead carefully as she gazed up into the painting, lamenting, it seemed, the earthly wars represented by this work of art. I too lamented at the scene. Both of us hoped for peace, each working toward it in different ways. Why it was that she would be forever without the joys of life, and the fruits of her labors, I do not know. Her hands were worn dry and calloused, her body thin through the robes.

This was the rice farmer's religion. His daughter was before me, and much too far away to reach. I was touched by her lack of evil. She was peaceful and repentant and surpassed the idol worship all about her. I wanted to kneel beside her and share her prayer, then to share with her whom I prayed to. If only she could know the light of Christ. *If only I could reach her*, I thought. The smell of incense was strong in the small room, and I turned to leave the solitary nun.

As I turned, I met a child in the doorway who had been watching me. She wore a bright yellow coat and stood motionless, looking up at me. Her mother was beyond her, kneeling at the outside altars. The girl looked scared as I stood above her. She dropped the orange that she was holding at the same time the nun arose from her bow. The gray saint paused, her eyes to the floor as she waited to exit. I turned to the girl again, "*Lai, lai,*" I said, motioning her forward. I bent to pick up the orange at my feet, then placed it in her hands and stood back. Her bright coat was a stark contrast to the nun as the girl handed the orange up from her hands. The nun did not move, apparently unable to directly accept the offering. Again fearful, the girl dropped her extended arm, then turned and offered the orange up to me. I paused uneasily and considered the impact of my acceptance. This too was the daughter of a rice farmer, or a half-bodied incense seller. She was a bright new beginning. She might still be reached, if only she grew to respect me as much as she did this gray nun.

I took the fruit and approached the painting. I placed it on the ashen floor: an offering to God. God who would bring peace, and who made this little girl. The girl's mother suddenly came into the doorway and called her child away.

The nun and I had not spoken, and she would not look up at me. She kept her head low as she left the room. I followed, and met Tsai again in the main hallway. "Where you go?" he said.

"Just looking around," I responded.

"Looooking around," he said. It was common for him to repeat my words and exaggerate the sounds. He was glancing around as he spoke, still looking for someone to speak with. He had evidently spoken to no

one.

"Should we go?" I said.

"We go." Tsai started marching out toward the shrill music. As we made our way out of the temple I turned and saw the bright yellow girl with her mother. The nun was gone, but I knew that I would see both of them again. I would see them everywhere. Perhaps their children, or their children's children, would see me.

No eyes seemed to watch us now as we left the temple. They all knew that we had failed, and they would go on with their worship as we went on with ours. I followed Tsai down the busy street, then out on to the highway where the noises and people were distant. My companion rode slowly now. He had nowhere left to go, and did not want to make it back to Chishan too soon.

I rode my usual distance behind him. He was humming to himself, the hymn that we had sung that morning. My pedal had stopped squeaking, perhaps due to the moist morning air. I passed the even rows of tobacco plants, miles and miles of them with spaces that chopped like frames of an old movie. There were banana fields at the foot of terraced hills. I looked up to the terraces, just visible in the mist, and thought I saw a cross standing tall, then walking heavy and bent.

MOUNT ZION

"We're going to Zion mountain today," Tsai said in Chinese to Mr. Wang. He had mentioned nothing about the trip in our morning planning together, and I wasn't aware of it until he informed Mr. Wang in the market.

"You won't do any converting up there," Wang responded. He and Tsai joked for a few minutes about the "Born Agains" who had established Zion's mountain in southern Taiwan. I understood little of what they said. Tsai had told me once something about a leader who claimed to have seen a vision and had gathered a community of believers to the mountain location of his revelation. It sounded familiar, but it was even more unusual because it had originated in a predominantly Taoist country.

Wang was a stout young man who sold pork in the market. I never saw him much except in his coverall apron with a knife in his hand surrounded by meat and fish. He never came to church, even though he had been a Mormon longer than anyone in Chishan. Mrs. Wang was usually with him, pregnant now and so overgrown that I felt we would miss the birth if we left them only a day. Even at nine months, Mrs. Wang lifted and cut the heavy slabs of flesh and stayed long days amid the grease and odor.

We left the Wangs and returned to our bicycles just outside the market. "So we're going to the mountains today?" I asked my companion.

"Yes," Tsai said. He wasn't one to give me any information that didn't seem necessary.

"Can we go home first, to get a sweater or something?" I asked. Our apartment was on the way to the train station.

"Yes. I need to get my Bible," he said. Tsai knew English well, but spoke it like a robot. He reminded me of all of those "made-in-Taiwan" computer toys.

He mounted his bike and started down the only major street in town. I followed and wondered to myself, as I did every day, how long I would be stuck in the smallest town in the mission. It had already been over one month, which meant at least a second month with this native companion. The official move day came only once a month, and unless there were extenuating circumstances missionaries never moved in between. I wondered if I had "extenuating circumstances." I hoped that at the Christmas conference I would have a chance to ask for a transfer.

I arrived home just behind Tsai and waited as he lifted the heavy front gate. All Taiwanese homes have heavy metal gates over their front entrances, and bars over the front windows. It didn't make missionaries feel welcome as we went tracting. Tsai grabbed an umbrella just inside the door, and I went up the stairs to get an extra sweater. I put my English Bible in my book bag, thinking that Tsai would need to look up scriptures in the index. Chinese Bibles didn't have an index, and using mine was the only thing that made me feel useful when we taught lessons. I took my camera out of the bottom drawer and stuffed it in my bag. It was against the mission rules to carry a camera except on Preparation Day, but I thought about the beautiful mountain scenes which before I had only seen in paintings. I thought I could get a few shots when Tsai wasn't looking.

Back at our front gate we did rock-paper-scissors to see who would pray. He won, but prayed anyway. He knew that I had no idea what to pray for. We then shut up our apartment and headed for the train station.

"I haven't been to Zion's mountain for a few years," Tsai said as we rode through town.

"Do you know anyone there?" I asked, happy to converse with my companion. He thought for a minute or so, probably about his last trip to Zion. I could see a sense of pride in Tsai, like a patriotic soldier going off to battle. There was nothing he wanted more than to convert a few of his own people, and those who were already Christians were a perfect target. Tsai had an incredible knowledge of the Bible and could challenge anyone who had a different interpretation and belonged to another faith.

"They would not know me now," he said, "it was a long time ago—

before anyone on the island knew the Christians." I had the impression that he had looked into the "Born Agains" before converting to Mormonism. He had told me once before about his family's strong objections to his Christian conversion. Conversion for him was like a long research project during his teenage years, and came about as more of a conversion to Western culture than a spiritual belief. Christianity was simply part of Western society.

The train station was on the north side of town, half way to Shen Li and serving all the surrounding villages. Twice a day the blue student train came in and out, and the track was left silent the rest of the day. Tsai loved to proselytize in the train station. He knew that young people, mostly students, would be the only ones to consider accepting Christianity and to accept the teachings of the Western world. It wasn't unusual for us to stand around train platforms twice a day so that Tsai could talk to students. I would attract them by speaking English, and Tsai would tell them who we were and turn it to a religious discussion. We walked in that morning as usual, then surprised the train master by buying tickets for a change.

We didn't wait long for the train, and Tsai was in a serious discussion with a young student as we boarded. Several kids from surrounding farms dressed in school uniforms boarded with us. I sat across from a group of girls just old enough to be in middle school. I could hear them saying "hello" and other English words then giggling. Finally one of them was brave enough to ask, "Are you American?" The other girls laughed, but were obviously jealous that this girl could speak with me.

"Yes," I said, "I am an American, are you?" They looked at each other, repeating the word "American" over and over as if in English class. The one girl repeated "are you" to herself, then realized what I had asked. She laughed and explained in Chinese to her friends.

"No, no!" she said, unsure whether I was serious or not. "We are . . ." she tried to phrase something else, but stuttered and asked her friends in Chinese how to say "Chinese."

"*Nimen shr Junggwo ren?*" I said. I knew my Chinese would go farther than their English. Young people were the only ones I could communicate with, and little did the girls know that I understood everything they said to each other. None of them responded to my question, but instead expressed surprise that I could speak Chinese.

The blue trains move slowly through the farmlands. I always thought that if a student missed the train, he could just run and jump on at a road intersection. Trains fascinated me: the windows were like television screens which slowly showed the world moving from one side to the other. The rhythm of the banging wheels made me sleepy, and I dozed off even as the girls were talking.

A change in the rhythm woke me, and I felt the train braking as it came into the station. Lyouli was not much bigger than any of the other local villages, but for some reason had both the middle and high schools. The students stood up and held on to the overhead bars. I looked over and noticed that Tsai had also dozed off, but then quickly woke himself. The train came to a complete stop and let us all off on the platform.

The students went one way, Tsai and I the other. I noticed that he didn't get a referral from the student he had been talking to, but he didn't say anything about it. We needed to take a bus up into the mountains, he told me.

We crossed the street to the bus station. A man stood out in front selling black eggs boiled in tea and gelatin bars made from rice and pig's blood. A woman next to him sat on the ground and placed in front of her the small plastic toys and gadgets she sold. The inside of the station had one row of light-blue chairs, a ticket counter, and a magazine stand. The men's magazines were displayed most prominently and served as a distraction to even the best missionary.

It was still early in the morning, and the only bus which passed by Zion Mountain wouldn't leave for over an hour. We each bought a ticket, then left the station to walk the streets.

The streets in Lyouli were the same as those everywhere else: the same places to eat, the same barbershops, the same post office. I had no idea where we were, but Tsai seemed to know where he was going. He didn't stop to talk to people outside the post office as he usually did, but instead walked on with some other destination in mind. We passed by a hair dresser's shop, then turned back and looked in the window. Tsai seemed to recognize something or someone, and turned the door handle to go in.

A single hair dresser was in the shop working on an older woman's hair. The older woman was embarrassed to be seen with rollers in her hair, but the shop owner was nice and said hello. Tsai started talking with her, and occasionally I heard the word "*Syian*" which meant "*Zion*." He must have known the woman, perhaps from several years ago. On her wall was a large photo of a group of people, about a hundred of them, assembled in front of a chapel. The insignia above them was a cross printed over a mountain, and I figured that she was one of them, whoever they were. Tsai saw me looking at the poster and turned to me to explain in English that her husband was "one of the leaders." I didn't want to offend the woman by speaking only in English, so I didn't respond to my companion. He continued talking to her.

I decided that she must have left her husband in the community on the mountain, perhaps coming down to the city to run her shop. The true "*Born Agains*" lived on the mountain itself, running a sort of commune

away from society. They had been in the news lately, Tsai had told me. A few months ago they had held a protest in Taiwan's capital city, ending in a clash with the police which left many of their leaders in the hospital. He didn't tell me what the protest was for.

We left the shop after a while. My companion had been very friendly with the woman, and left looking as if he had accomplished something—as if we were really getting somewhere. We walked back toward the bus station, stopping to eat at a morning shop. I had been on island for a few months, and was just learning to like the warm soy milk. I dipped my boiled bread in the milk, then brought the warm bowl to my mouth and felt the steam on my chilled face.

It was mid-morning when the bus came. We boarded with several others and left for the mountains. I looked at the passengers with us on the bus and thought it was obvious that we were headed away from the city. They were mountain people with dark skin and rough hair. An older man sat in the back holding two live roosters, their feet wired together, their wings tied. A woman in front of him wore a dirty coat with holes in it and looked as if she'd never bathed in her life. There was a man in front who spoke to himself in old Taiwanese, and a couple to the side of us who spoke a language I had never heard before. They were undoubtedly simple people, and I knew that my companion would not try to talk with any of them. Tsai said that converting someone of that background was next to impossible.

The bus was old and rickety, the mountain road getting more and more bumpy as we went along. At one point a bridge had been washed out by a recent flood, and we had to take a muddy detour another way. The forest on the sides of the bus became more and more dense as we ascended into the cloud-covered mountains. I could feel the mist and see the moisture on the surrounding vines and palms.

Our first stop was atop a steep hill where a little village stood. The man with the roosters got off, and the couple next to us. I could see that some farming had been done on the terraced hills, just like the pictures I had seen of areas on the mainland. The bus started up again, now winding around the sides of a steeper mountain climb.

After about an hour Tsai and I were the only passengers left. We continued winding around the mountains, and I feared that at any minute we might fall off the edge. Finally we stopped near a long bridge at the base of a mountain. The bus driver turned back to Tsai and said, "*Syian Shan*," then opened the door. We got out on to the road and watched the bus continue up the mountainside, on to another set of mountains in the distance. The mountain in front of us, partially covered by clouds, must have been "Zion mountain."

The bridge we had just crossed had the characters "fifty-nine" in-

scribed in its post. "Wait," I said, before we turned on the dirt road leading up the mountain. "I want to take a picture." I pulled the camera out of my bag.

"Oh—you not supposed to bring your camera," Tsai said.

"I know, but just let me get a picture here." I asked him to stand with his umbrella in front of the post, with the misty hills in the background—just like I had seen in all of those paintings. "It's very American," I finally said, trying to coerce him, "there's a song by Simon and Garfunkel with the name of this bridge." He didn't understand who I was talking about, but posed anyway upon hearing that it was "very American." I took the photo of him, and didn't ask for one of myself.

"Okay," he said, "we go to *Zion mountain!*" Tsai had been in the army for two years and now marched with his umbrella, making fun of those Born Agains who "come to Zion mountain." He too had come here once, but I didn't remind him of that.

A muddy road led up the mountain and into the clouds. A gatekeeper was friendly to us and let us through the main gates. I saw only a few rooftops while we were climbing, but at the top the trees opened up to reveal an entire camp of huts and wooden buildings. There were children playing in a large grassy area, and a few men talking in front of one of the homes. One of the men saw us and approached us. I was expecting the worst.

He said "hello" to us, first in Chinese then in English. He smiled after saying it in English, as if he had said it incorrectly. Chinese people always did this, even if their words were as clear as mine. He seemed to know who we were, as though he were expecting us. Tsai later told me the man was the husband of the woman in the hairdresser's shop. He invited us up to the chapel, speaking with Tsai as we began walking.

The two of them told me about the camp's inception, and how and why it was founded in Taiwan. I understood just a little of what they said, but mainly watched the clouds lowering down all around us. We approached a large boulder with a plaque on it on a grassy hillside. This, I inferred, was the site of the vision which the leader had received. The man then pointed up the hillside where a chapel could faintly be seen through the mist. We walked up and entered this shrine.

The Chapel of Zion had just recently been completed, a beautiful wooden chapel built just a few years after the "vision." It blended into the surrounding forest like a log cabin would, and it had seats inside for about a hundred people. A large pipe organ stood in front, and to the sides there were only glass walls and doors so that one could look out into the mist. *This was the top of the camp*, I thought to myself, *the pinnacle of Zion mountain*. The man sat down with Tsai and began comparing interpretations of scriptures in the Bible. I could tell that things were going

to get heated, and Tsai was so involved I had no trouble slipping away and walking to the front of the chapel.

At one point Tsai turned around and called for me, but simply asked for my English Bible. I went back and gave it to him so that he could look up scriptures in the index, then I returned to the front of the chapel. The organ was fascinating, the workmanship must have taken several years. I was reminded of the sacrifices which early Mormons made to build our temples and chapels. I could see nothing through the mist outside the glass walls, but imagined just below us a large camp of religious people working and living day to day. I could envision all of them in a line making the trek up the grassy hill to worship in this beautiful chapel. I thought of the rock below, a sacred shrine where a sleepy hiker once saw a "vision."

Tsai finally got up and called for me again. We were going to miss our bus if we didn't get back down the mountain. The scriptorians had quarrelled, but both were willing to part in peace. It had been completely unfruitful. I think that Tsai needed to run into a person like that every few weeks, just to brush up on his scriptures and to be sure that they knew the Mormons were still around.

The man took us down the hill, past the rock again and back into the camp. He insisted on showing us some of the things posted on a wall outside the school before we left. There were pictures of the protest which had occurred just earlier, and scenes of policeman beating on men in white robes. He pointed to one picture. "This was our leader," he said with a smile, in English. The photo showed an older man with a large bloody wound on his head. In the next picture he stood in front of a crowd, still bleeding, and held his hands toward heaven.

"Is he dead?" I asked.

"No no," replied the man. "Just not here today." There was something suspicious in the quick way in which he replied, but I thought it just sounded funny because he was trying to speak in English.

The man walked us to the gate and said goodbye. I think that he invited us to return again. The gatekeeper must have been surprised to see us all so friendly, and then to see Tsai and me begin running down the mountain.

About half way down the muddy road we saw the silver bus below us through the mist. It didn't stop. Tsai shook his head as we watched it disappear down the mountain road. He began to get angry in Chinese, unsure of whether to yell at me, or the man, or himself for coming on this crazy adventure.

"What now?" he exclaimed. "This is not like America." I wasn't sure what he meant. Chinese people seemed to have this impression that everything was wonderful in America, and if you were stuck in the moun-

tains it would be easy to find a ride down, or call the local police. "We can't go back," he said. He had obviously considered this option, weighing in his mind images of the evening with the Born Agains. We continued down in the mud, much cooler now in the late afternoon and the mist rising.

We leaned against the Fifty-ninth Street bridge. A car drove by—the first I had seen on that road. "You see—not like America," Tsai said. It might have helped if he had put his thumb out, or waved his hands. A few minutes passed on the bridge. It was going to be a long walk down in the dark. I started reconsidering my allegiance to my companion, knowing that one of the Zionists would have a car, or at least a warm hut for the night.

Finally the sound of a loud motor came from up the road. Coming around the bend was one of the three-wheeled farm trucks which I had seen down in the villages. The big blue trucks are no more than motorcycles which someone has added huge iron truck beds to, and surrounded the front with metal caging like an assault vehicle. Tsai shot out in the road, completely blocking the bridge and waving his hands for the farmer to stop. The man stopped, the sound of the machine almost unbearable so close to us. Tsai approached him and yelled something in the native language, a tongue which I could not speak nor understand. The man nodded, and Tsai called me over to ride on a make-shift iron seat next to the farmer. Tsai must have seen this as the better option than riding in the back, and he gave it up to me in a fatherly way. He gave me a look of assurance that we would get down safely, then jumped in the back of the truck. I knew that I was in for the ride of my life: down the muddy mountain rode and looking over the ledge into the steep canyon, sitting next to a man who didn't speak Chinese.

It was almost dark when we passed the first mountain village. The natives looked out of their open front doors at an American in dress clothes riding beside a farmer in his roaring machine. The glowing indoor lights made silhouettes of the village families in their doorways. These were simple people, probably the same people who rode up on the bus with us. It seemed that for years to come they might talk about what they saw coming down the mountain that night, and yet none of them would ever know anything about missionaries, or the church, or Christianity. I suddenly felt futile, and at the same time safe in the hands of one of them as we continued down the mountain.

In Lyouli the only lights came from the bus station. The farmer dropped us off just across the street, then raced off into the night. Fortunately there was a bus which would take us back to Chishan, and we would avoid waiting for the train which didn't come until the next morning. The late-night bus was empty except for us and another man who

looked as if he were from the mainland. He and the bus driver talked in loud Mandarin accents about the Japanese and the war and Christianity in China. Tsai and I sat in the back, and shared a package of vanilla cookies he had bought at the station.

At midnight we were dropped off in Chishan, a few blocks from the station where we had locked our bikes. We walked for a few minutes in silence and in a light rain, then Tsai spoke: "The trip to Mt. Zion," he repeated in a whisper to himself. He was proud to have brought me back safely. I knew that he was afraid of what I might report to the mission president, and I'm sure he didn't want the president to know about the trip to Zion Mountain at all, but he could meet that next battle as it came. I had no intention of saying anything. We walked through the empty streets and I thought of the adventure of our day. The next day we would be walking these streets again, talking to the shop owners, handing out pamphlets, and doing what missionaries did every day.

THE LONG SUMMER

At 5:00 a.m. the sun blazed into our white-tiled bedroom. My eyes opened just enough to see my companion in the other bed with his sheets pulled over his eyes. I rolled over and faced the wall, then brought my sheets up to cover my eyes until 6:30.

Promptly at 6:29 my alarm went off, giving me just a minute to stretch and yawn and consider staying in bed before getting up. It was time again to be a missionary: just one of two full years of early mornings away from home. Trussel was in the same position as I had seen him earlier. His sheets were still pulled up over his eyes to block the bright sun. I left him in the bedroom asleep and went out into the kitchen, closing the bedroom door behind me.

In the fridge was a leftover bottle of peach soda pop which had gone flat. I took a drink from the bottle to get some sugar in my system before going outside to exercise. I could hear Cox and Robinson moving the chairs around in their bedroom, beginning their morning companion study. I didn't want to face Cox or to talk to him, so I shut the fridge quietly and crept out our front door.

Our apartment in Tainan was an addition above the top floor of a five-story building, built and rented to us illegally by the landlord. It was very clean and in a good location, so we pretended to be naive about the laws and decided to stay as long as we could. The front door led out directly on to the cement roof where I exercised every morning. Trussel would never go out jogging with me, so I was forced to do aerobics on the roof or play tennis down in the garage—anything which kept me within reasonable proximity of my companion. Such were the rules.

It was a glorious day and well into sunlight by 6:30 in the morning. I was instantly reminded of "soccer days" back in high school: the clear spring afternoons when I would head to the park to play soccer with the team. All the greens and the yellows were like an impressionist painting on those days, and to run freely out in the moist air was a feeling I had not forgotten. Even two years later and half way across the world I remembered it. I walked out and leaned over the side of our building, feeling the intense heat and the full humidity from the recent rains.

Tainan is a low-built city. I could look and see thousands of five-story apartment buildings stretching out in all directions. Each was topped with a small spherical water tower and several television antennas. There were clothes strung up on lines every now and then, including my own just to the side of where I stood. The city was quiet, and bright. The array of buildings ended about three or four miles out, then the blue ocean filled the picture to the horizon. I leaned up against the wall and began stretching out for my exercises.

Trussel was up by the time I went back inside. He was in the kitchen making pancakes. My peach soda pop was on the table.

"Would you like some pancakes, Elder Allen?" Trussel asked. "I'm making some for everybody. How was your exercising?" He knew that he had slept in, and tried to keep me from mentioning it.

"Good," I said. I took another drink.

"Why don't you shower and come back and have pancakes," Trussel said. He took the can of powdered milk from a cupboard.

"You'll make somebody a great housewife some day, Trussel," I said. He knew that I wanted him to study in the morning and not to spend his time making pancakes.

"I promise I'll go and study," he said, "just as soon as we're done with pancakes."

"I'll just have to remember to tell the mission president what a great cook you are when he asks me why I've failed you as a trainer." I found it difficult to nag him for not studying. He found so much pleasure in cooking and writing letters and making cards for people that he had no desire to study. I wondered why someone who could do so much good and service in an English-speaking mission was sent to Taiwan. I left him to his work and headed for the shower, just missing Cox and Robinson as they emerged from their study room.

Elder Cox and I did not hit things off well from the first day he moved in. He was the first roommate I didn't get along with in over a year in Taiwan, and I had started avoiding him to keep from getting angry. He and Robinson came home late every night and talked about how well their work was going and how many people they were teaching. Cox would stay up late calling people on the phone, working "overtime"

as it were, then getting up promptly at 6:30 a.m. to start companion study. He knew that I hated companion study, and for him it was just one more thing that he did right and I did wrong. At a time when my teaching pool and other missionary work were at an absolute low, there was nothing worse than meeting up with Elder Cox and his companion. I avoided being home as much as possible, and stayed secluded in my room when I was there.

At exactly 9:30 I heard the front door open and close, my roommates leaving, then I came out of my study room to get dressed and prepare to go out. Trussel was still on his knees in prayer, as he was for almost an hour every morning, and I rushed him along to get out the door. It was Tuesday morning, the day after our only weekly "day off" as missionaries. Tuesday mornings always became a time to recover from our Preparation Day activities, and we usually got little work done. We delivered letters to the post office, visited the morning market, and had some photocopies made for the afternoon district meeting. We rode our bikes slowly from one place to another, hoping perhaps to see someone we knew and be able to stop and talk. If we talked with someone, we could count the time as "friendshipping," or better yet "first contacting," rather than writing to the president in our weekly inventory that we had done some busy work. Trussel quietly followed behind me, still fascinated with the Chinese scenes around him. He had only been in Taiwan a month.

We picked up some egg-fried rice for lunch and took it to the chapel to eat before our meeting. Inside it was air-conditioned and empty. We ate our lunch in the chapel kitchen, then went into separate rooms to study: Trussel his oral lessons, and I vocabulary cards. At 1:00 I heard Elders Cox and Robinson come in the main door. I hadn't heard Trussel reciting his lessons, and knew he was asleep. I hoped they wouldn't walk in on him. The door opened across the hall. A minute later they came into my room, Trussel sleepily behind.

"Hello, Elder Allen," Cox said. He didn't have to say a word about what had happened. He pulled up two chairs for the sister missionaries, who always came late, and two for himself and Robinson. I passed out the agenda for our meeting, then waited for the sisters.

It was my turn to teach the lesson at our weekly training meeting. I was hoping to skip it. Sister Wolsey and her companion came in at 1:30 with fresh cookies in their hands. Elder Cox was out in the hallway making phone calls.

"Sorry we're late," Sister Wolsey said.

"It's okay," I said, "I don't think we had much to learn in a lesson today anyway." There were strict rules in the mission against any Elder/Sister interaction, so we were careful not to speak too friendly or sit too

close. I think she saw that I liked her, though.

Cox came in the room, and I spoke before he could sit. "We'll just have a planning meeting today, Elder Cox," I said, "and I'll save the lesson for next week."

"That's fine," he said. "Robinson and I have an appointment to go to anyway." He was always telling us how much work he was doing.

By 2:00 everyone had left the chapel but Trussel and me. We walked out and locked the doors, then sat on our bikes for a moment while deciding where to go. Trussel could sense my frustration. He knew that we didn't have a 2:00 appointment. We didn't have any appointments that day. He wanted to help in some way, but knew that he was useless in doing any kind of missionary work. All he could do was to stay quiet and act supportive while I thought.

"Elder Trussel," I said, "we do basically the same thing every day." I sat for a moment longer. "I think we're both getting pretty tired of the mall, and the park, and the Cultural Center." He was still. "Let's do something really different today," I said. "Come on." I started off on my bike and headed out through the front gates.

After a few minutes Trussel pulled up to the side of me. "Elder Allen," he said, "I just want you to know that I'm okay with the malls and the parks, and everything we do, and I really think you're doing the best you can here in this city, and even though things aren't going well I don't want you to get frustrated because of me."

"I'm okay," I said. We rode on another minute or so.

"Where are we going?" he asked.

"We're going home, Trussel," I said. He seemed not to know what I meant. "We're going to get our mail and a bottle of water and head out to the beach in our missionary clothes. There just may be some people out there who are interested in listening to us." Trussel slowed down and rode behind me again. He didn't respond, but I knew he was happy with my decision.

There were several letters in our mailbox—one for me from my mom and two for Trussel, and one each for Cox and Robinson. I put it all in my book bag as Trussel came down the stairs with a bottle of cold water. The beach was about a thirty-minute ride from our apartment.

It was a quiet neighborhood with another wide street when Trussel again rode up beside me. "What'd I get?" he asked. I hadn't shown him what was in the mailbox.

"You got something," I said, "you'll see what it is." We made one stop on the way to visit a member who lived in the area. I wanted to feel that we had *some* purpose in going out that direction. The man wasn't home, and we continued on toward the beach.

The beaches outside of Tainan were of gray sand and nearly covered in litter. There were long pontoon fishing boats which looked wrecked up on the shore, awaiting an evening tide to take them out again. Driftwood and seaweed surrounded the boats and dotted the shoreline along with the bottles and cans and old clothes. The waves crashed at a distance from the shore, then washed up foamy ripples in the shallows. Every few hundred feet stood a small fishing house or tourist stop, many of them closed up and vandalized. Business must have failed. It was a sad sight to see so much potentially beautiful beachland completely unused. We rode on to the edge of an army base which I remembered was a bit cleaner than the rest of the beach. We had played volleyball there once before on a P-day.

The sun was hot and intense. The sky seemed immense over the blue ocean water. I could see miles of open water and an occasional barge or fishing vessel on the horizon. They said that even on a clear day it was impossible to see the mainland, but I looked out anyway and imagined there was land in the distance. Elder Trussel and I parked our bikes near the gates of the army post while a guard with a machine gun eyed us closely. We walked out on the sand without locking the bikes.

I sat down on a log near the water before realizing there were smudges of tar on it. I stood up and threw sand over the tar, then sat back down and started taking my shoes and socks off. Trussel sat in the sand and followed, and both of us revealed wrinkled white toes which hadn't seen the sun in months. I stood and walked out into the cold water, relieving my feet of the "dark-sock disease."

"What did I get?" Trussel asked.

"It's in my bag," I said, "go ahead and open it." He rummaged through my bag on the sand until he found his letters. He looked at them for several minutes, then decided to open the largest one first. He set the other aside very carefully. I turned and closed my eyes, putting my face up to the sun and scratching my feet in the cool sand.

About halfway through the first letter Trussel starting talking again. He told me about the Thompsons and how there was a big family scandal about their ice cream business. He used to work for them. His mom also told him about a girl they knew who was coming to Taiwan on a mission, but she thought it was the other mission and not ours.

"Do you know, Elder Allen, that we have a Fourth of July breakfast in our yard every year for the *whole* neighborhood?" He had finished his first letter, and was still recalling the details. "Mom said that the yard is getting too small to hold all the people. We should have a celebration here for the Fourth—we could invite all the church members over and . . ."

"It's an American holiday, Trussel," I said.

"Well," he thought for a moment. "Maybe they wouldn't mind—when's the Taiwan day or whatever they call it?"

"October tenth," I said.

He was quiet and solemn, then turned to the smaller letter. It was a letter from a missionary friend in South America. He told him about the success they were having—something like a hundred baptisms per week. I had friends in South America too, in Chile and Peru. "You've got to be glad we're not living in South America," I said. "They live in shacks and bathe in infested water." Trussel was quiet and sad. "All of my friends there have gotten sick," I said.

I stopped talking and decided to let him be sad. We were from the same area back home and knew some of the same friends, but I had been away from it all well over a year. I didn't take letters as hard as he did. His sadness must have continued for the forty minutes or so when I was asleep.

When I awoke my face felt as if it was burning red, even though the sun was no longer so bright. Clouds had moved in quickly from nowhere. Clouds meant rain in Taiwan, even on sunny days. I knew that we would never make it home before the rains started, and by dark a full storm might come.

"Are you ready to go?" I said. Trussel was still sitting right behind me and had not fallen asleep. We both knew we had been there too long and it was time to get back to work. "Come on," I said, "let's ride along the water." The letters would make Trussel sad for a day or so.

We strapped our bookbags on to our bikes and started out toward the water line. Our bikes wouldn't move through the dry sand, so we got off and pushed them out. After a few trials, I figured out that if we rode just along the edge of the water the sand was dense enough to keep us up. One move either way, however, would throw us off our bikes and into the sand or the water. I jumped on and started riding, Trussel struggled behind me.

Riding through water was exhilarating, and we must have looked like a Pepsi commercial to some of the fishermen coming down to the shore to go out for the evening. I was half-covered in mud and salt water when we reached an impassable dike. "They don't do that in South America," I said when Trussel pumped up to the dike. He was still sad, but tried to smile a bit to show me he was getting better. I looked down and noticed that it was almost 5:00 as we were leaving the beach.

It rained a warm summer rain as we rode back toward town. Elder Trussel rode behind me, elated to be soaking wet because it ruined the chance of doing any more work that day. I could hear him behind me going through the deepest part of the puddles and laughing. Every part of us was wet, and we felt as if we had taken a swim for the first time in

years. Gutters flooded with muddy water and cars splashed us as we got into the city streets and rode back to our apartment. There we stopped for dinner and to dry our clothes so we could go back out in the evening.

It was late in the evening when the rain stopped. We had been walking through the mall most of the evening and emerged with umbrellas in hand, only to see mist rising from the streets and a clearing sky above. It was quiet again; shop owners swept rocks off their porches and prepared to close up their shops.

Our apartment was about a twenty-minute ride along Jyankang Road, through the center of town. Half way there we were held up by traffic, and proceeded to wind our bicycles through cars and buses until we hit the roadblock. In front of us was an amazing sight. The entire neighborhood was lit up by huge construction lights which had just been turned on. Backing into place was an orange crane probably 100 feet long. People everywhere began to gather around in an immense circle, making way for construction vehicles as policemen ordered. Trussel and I squeezed our bikes over to the side of the road and locked them to a tree, not knowing what was happening but wanting to be part of it.

We joined the people in the circle and finally got to a point where we could look up. There in front of us and entirely illuminated by the lights was a four-story building leaning to one side and apparently ready to fall any minute. The hole of a construction site next to the building had filled with water, and the ground around it was so muddy that the foundations had slid out from under it. Policemen held us back from the center space—children, mothers, businessmen, old farmers. Each movement of the rising crane brought a loud sigh from the surrounding crowd—a sigh of both fear and excitement as if any wrong jolt would bring the entire neighborhood crashing down. Still the building hung there, unmoved. The small dark-brown bodies of construction men worked below in setting up pumps and supports and the enormous orange crane which rose above us.

More police arrived and worked to evacuate neighboring buildings and to clear people from surrounding sidewalks. Soon the power was shut off and the huge mass of people was left in the dark staring up at the bright falling building. Trussel and I stayed next to each other but quickly became pressed up against the others. Within minutes it seemed that the entire community was there, gathered in a circle and gazing up in awe at the disaster about to occur.

We stayed there for several minutes as the crane moved into place and the pumps began working. Minutes stretched into an hour, and people were no longer staring in silence but instead talking with each other and making bets on whether it would fall.

"Too bad Cox and Robinson aren't here," I said to Trussel. He looked over at me and smiled as if we both knew a secret.

"Look! There are the sisters," he said. I looked over and saw Sister Wolsey waving to us from behind the crowd. They had just gotten on their bikes and were leaving. Trussel was waving his arm back and forth at them.

The crane moved in large, sweeping movements as it took iron beams off a nearby truck. The huge circle spread far out into the neighborhood now, but became less and less dense as people walked around and talked with each other. Old men smiled and nodded as they walked by the two Americans, proud somehow of the awesome spectacle which their country could produce. We nodded back and began talking to some of the high-spirited people around us. The children ran around us and shouted "hello" in their Chinese accents. Up the street I could see people going in and out of a bakery which had apparently stayed open late. The entire scene was like an outdoor carnival, and the excitement below contrasted greatly with the ominous hanging building above us.

At about 11:00 p.m. we decided to ride home. The building appeared stable now and the people around us had dispersed as they saw the relief in the construction workers' faces. It was late, and the area was quiet again. We rode down side streets and moist alleyways.

As we walked in the front door I could see the outline of Cox standing in his doorway. He shut the door to his bedroom without saying a word.

"I'm so tired," Trussel said. "We had quite an adventure today." He went into the bathroom to brush his teeth. I wasn't sleepy, so I went into our study room to read for a while.

Trussel poked his head in the doorway a few minutes later. "Elder Allen," he said. He had bright bermuda shorts on and an American flag T-shirt. "Thanks."

"Sure," I said. He turned and went in the dark bedroom and left me by myself.