WARNING
TO THE PEOPLE

E-ASIA
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IT WAS quiet on a certain street in the western part of the nation's Exemplary City.

Although the fiery sun was not yet directly overhead, the street sands were already glinting with light and the fierce heat everywhere proclaimed the power and tyranny of summer. The dogs lolled out their tongues and even the crows in the trees open their mouths and panted for breath. However, there were exceptions, naturally. There was, for instance, the sound of two brass cups being struck together, reminding one ice cold suan-mei-t'ang and suggesting cool delight, though the intermittent entrance this monotony of metallic sound only served to emphasize the stillness.

There was only the sound of footsteps of grim ricksha men who seemed to be trying to run away from the fierce sun overhead.

"Hot bautze-a-a .. ! Just out of the steamer ..."

A fat boy about eleven or twelve years old cried before a shop, his eyes squinted and his mouth cocked to one side. His voice had already become hoarse and he was sleepy, as if hypnotized by the long summer day. On the old and rickety table by his side there was a pile of twenty or thirty stuffed rolls with not the least suggestion of being hot.
"Ho-a-a ..! Mantou batze-a-a- . . , hot . .

Then like a rubber ball that had been thrown against the wall and had bounced back, he suddenly flew across to the other side of the street. At that moment two men were standing by a telephone post, opposite him and facing the street: one was a lean and sallow policeman with a sword and wearing a light yellow uniform; he held in his hand one end of a rope while the other end was tied to the arm of a man in a long blue cotton gown with a white vest over it. The man wore a new straw hat with the rim turned down all around and covering his eyes. When the fat boy looked up, however, his line of vision collided with the man's eyes and the man's eyes appeared to be leveled at his own head. He quickly lowered his focus on the white vest and discovered on it line after line of characters of varying sizes.
In another instant a semi-circle of spectators had formed in front of the policeman and his prisoner. By the time a bald old man had joined the semicircle there was very little space left and almost immediately even that space was filled by a big fat man with a red nose, naked to the waist. The fat man was entirely too broad and occupied the space of two, so that the spectators who continued to arrive had to stand on the second row and stick their heads out between the necks of those in front.

The bald man was standing almost directly in front of the man with the white vest. He leaned forward and began to study the characters written on the vest and ended up by reading them aloud.

The fat boy noticed that the man in the white vest was, on his side, studying the shiny bald head. Thereupon he followed the former’s example but could, outside of an oily and shiny scalp and patches of gray hair over his ears, discover nothing of interest. In the meantime a nurse maid with a baby in her arms was trying to squeeze in as the posture that the old man had assumed offered her an opportunity. The bald man was, however, loth to lose his place and forestalled her by standing up straight. He had not yet finished reading, but that could not be helped. He turned his attention to the face of the man in the white vest and saw under the rim of his straw hat half of his nose, a mouth and a pointed chin.

Again like a rubber ball that had been thrown against a wall and had bounced back, a school boy dashed up and set about to burrow his way into the semicircle, his hand overholding the white cotton hat that he was wearing. But when he reached the third—or it might have been the fourth—row, he struck something gigantic and impossible to budge. When he looked up he saw a very broad naked back above the waist of a pair of blue pants and quantities of sweat trickling down along it. Realizing the futility of trying to break through this wall, he turned to the right along the waist of the blue pants and discovered at the end a strip of empty space through which light was coming through. But just as he lowered his head and was about to bore his way through, he heard a "What do you
want?" and observed a yawning movement of a pair of buttocks below the waist of the blue trousers. The empty space was immediately sealed up and with it the light that was coming through disappeared.

But after a while the school boy managed to emerge beside the policeman's sword. He looked around wonderingly: beyond him a crowd of people, above him a man with a white vest, opposite him a fat boy naked to the waist, and behind the fat boy a big man with a red nose, also naked to the waist. Then it dawned upon him that this was the man whose back had presented such an insurmountable obstruction to him on the other side, and he could not help but fix his eyes on the man's red nose in wonder and admiration. As the fat boy had been watching the schoolboy's face, he now followed the latter's line of vision and turned his head around. What he saw was the man's fat breast with a few long hairs around his nipples.

"What is the man, er, guilty of?"

The voice that broke the silence and startled everyone came from a man who appeared to be a labourer. He had humbly directed his question to the bald old man.

The bald man did not answer him but simply stared at him steadily until he lowered his eyes. When he looked up again after a while, the bald man was still staring at him. Moreover, he felt that every one else was staring at him too. This made him feel as uncomfortable as if he had committed a crime himself and in the end forced him to back out and slink away, whereupon a long fellow with an umbrella stepped up and filled the place that he had vacated, while the bald man again turned his attention to the white vest.

For a while the long fellow bent over to get a better view of White Vest's face under the rims of his straw hat, but when for one reason or another he suddenly straightened up his back it again became necessary for those standing behind them to stretch out their necks. A thin man had to stretch out his neck so much that his mouth dropped open like a huge dead perch.

Now the policeman suddenly lifted a foot without any warning. At this the crowd was again startled and turned their attention to the policeman's feet. But as the feet remained inactive, the interest shifted back to White Vest. The long fellow now bent his waist once more to investigate under the straw hat but once more he straightened up, only this time he lifted one hand and scratched his head violently.

Bald Head now appeared annoyed, for he had just sensed a disturbance of the peace behind his back, followed by the sound of munching and smacking. He looked back with a frown and caught sight of a black hand in the act of stuffing a large hunk of mantou into the mouth of a man with a cat's face. Bald Head decided to say nothing and turned his gaze at White Vest's new straw hat.

Suddenly the fat man staggered forward as a hand just about as big and fat as his own reached over his shoulders, stretched out its fingers and struck a blow on the fat boy's cheek that resounded like a clap of thunder.
"Having a good time, eh? Your mother's—" a man with an even rounder laughing Buddha face said in the back of the fat man.

The fat boy staggered forward four or five steps but did not fall. With one hand on his cheek he turned about and tried to escape through the space alongside of the fat man's leg when the latter steadied himself and filled up the space with a yawning movement of his buttocks, saying angrily, "What do you want?"

The fat boy darted hither and yon confusedly like a mouse that had fallen into a trap, but suddenly he made a straight dash in the direction of the school boy, pushed him aside and succeeded in breaking through. The school boy also turned and followed him out.

"Hey, the idea of the boy . . . ." said five or six men with one sentiment.

When, after quiet had been restored, the fat man again looked at White Vest's face, he discovered that White Vest was looking up at his chest. Hastily he looked down at his own chest and saw that there was a patch of sweat between the protrusions on his chest. He brushed the sweat off with his hand.

The general situation was, however, no longer as peaceful and satisfactory. The nurse maid with the
baby in her arms happened to turn her head to look around during a general excitement and
unintentionally brushed the tip of her elaborate, magpie tail shaped hair dress against the nose of a
ricksha man. The latter gave a push and landed his hand on the child. Thereupon the child twisted itself
around facing the outside of the circle and clamored to go home. The push had also staggered the nurse
maid, but she steadied herself, turned the child round to face White Vest again, and said, pointing with
one hand, "Look there! Goody, goody!"

A young man with a stiff straw hat and looking like a student suddenly stuck in his head through an
empty space, put some sort of melon seed into his mouth, gave it a crack between his teeth, and then
withdrew. His place was taken by an oval face covered with dirt and grease.

Now the long fellow with the umbrella appeared annoyed and was frowning and staring over his
shoulder at Dead Perch. It was very likely that the hot breath which came out of the huge mouth was
nothing easy to put up with at any time, least of all during the height of summer. The bald man was
looking at the four characters on a red tablet nailed to the telephone pole and seemed to take a great
interest in it. The fat man and the policeman were studying the tip of the nurse maid's sickle like feet out
of the corners of their eyes.

"Look at that!"

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People shouted out somewhere. As this held out new promises for all those present, every one turned
around, including even the policeman and his prisoner.

"Bautze just out of the steamer! Ho-a-a, hot . . ."

The fat boy was crying sleepily with his mouth cocked on one side; the ricksha men on the street were
running grimly as if trying to escape from the tyranny of the hot sun overhead. The crowd was about to
give up hope entirely when their perseverance was finally rewarded with the discovery, at about ten or
fifteen houses away, of a standing ricksha and a ricksha man just getting up from the ground.

The semicircle immediately broke up and straggled off in that direction. The fat man stopped to rest
under a locust tree before he had gone half way, while the long fellow, who walked faster than either
Bald Head or Oval Face, was the first to reach the scene. The passenger was still seating in the ricksha,
but the man had gotten up, still rubbing his knee caps. Around them were five or six men laughing and
grinning at them.

"Can you go on?" the passenger asked as the ricksha man started to pick up the shafts.

The latter only nodded, pulled up the ricksha and went off, with the crowd following him with their
eyes. For a while they were able to tell which was the ricksha that had had a fall, but soon it got lost
among the other rickshas.

The street became quiet again. There were several dogs all panting with tongues out, the rapid rising and
falling of their bellies being watched by the big fat man, who continued to rest under the locust tree.

The nurse maid hobbled off under the shade of the eaves with the child in her arms. And the fat boy with eyes squinted down to thin slits, his mouth cocked to one side and his voice drawn out, continued to cry sleepily ---
"Hot bautze-a-a . . .! Ho-a-a! Mantou bautze just . . . ."

* Pen-name of Chou Shu-jen, 1881-1936.