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A Small Disciple of Jesus

(A Chinese Story from San Francisco)

[Taken from: *Heidenkinder in Jesu Licht. Missionsgeschichten mit Bildern von Frieda Pfinzner. Basler Mission Zürich. Frankfurt a. M., Verlag Orient 1912*]

As always, there was the glow of the red lanterns against the evening sky in the Chinese Streets of San Francisco, with its market stands and a mixture of life and activity. There were all sorts of vegetables, pails full of bean sprouts, and baskets with rice that line the street inviting the shopper to buy.

Banning his way through these marvels, rushed a small boy, gasping breathlessly and fighting back tears.

From some distance away the boy, Huie was his name, caught a glimpse of his three year old brother, Little-Lin, who was dressed in his blue "shom" (Chinese jacket) standing on a high balcony over the street. With great eagerness, the small boy (Little-Lin) lowered his plastic toy frog down on a long thread, swinging it back and forth.

Huie hurried quickly past the house "To the Golden Tooth" on which five large golden teeth in front of the balcony indicated the apartment of the Chinese Dentist. He paid no attention to this. Through a narrow door, he lunged into one of the neighboring houses, ran up a tight, narrow stairway, and stepped hastily into a half darkened room.

There sat his Mother, Oney, who covered buttons with ribbon for a business—because buttons of the American style are not allowed in Chinese culture.

"Father, father!" sobbed Huie as he rushed into the room. "Father- he is gone! Someone has taken him out to the great water! He will never come back! And Uncle Ting is coming!"

Huie's young mother let the ribbon drop out of her hand. She sat up half-way and stared blankly at her son. No, she couldn't believe it! Her husband did not come home the night before; she was very shocked and frightened, but she had to continue to sew all of the ribbon buttons. And as a Chinese woman she could not go out onto the street in order to find him.

Meanwhile Huie continued to sob. The "people catchers" had taken Huie's Father on board the American fishing boat that had left for Alaska the day before, and mean

Uncle Ting said that the Gods only allowed this to happen to father because he was a Christian.

The ship should be gone for at least six months, and Uncle Ting said that father would be thrown into the sea and never return!—Oh no, father would never come back!

Now poor Oney fully understood. With a loud cry, she sank to her knees before her shrine to the Gods. Although her husband was a Christian, she had remained a heathen. She cried loud to the goddess of mercy, jumped to her feet and lit incense candles and threw herself on the ground again and then tried to pull Huie to his knees before the shrine to the Gods.

But the boy tore himself from her. “No, no!” he called, “I can not pray there!” At his father’s wish, he had gone into the mission school, and since then he no longer prayed to the Gods of his mother and no longer lit incense candles for them.

Little-Lin came in from the balcony with his toy frog, and when he saw his mother screaming and crying and praying to the goddess of the mercy, he also began to whine and lament loudly, without knowing why.

This is how the ferociously scowling Uncle Ting found them. He trampled up the stairs and viewed the whole scene with obvious satisfaction.

“He will never come back,” he said harshly. “They got him.”

Ah Oney didn’t listen to him. She was still on her knees, moaning loudly. Her husband was very dear to her, especially after Christianity made him very gentle and friendly. In spite of her cries of pain, Uncle Ting continued his explanation.

It happened quite often that some Chinese, belonging to the worst Chinese groups in San Francisco, hired on to a fishing boat bound for Alaska. The ship’s captain paid these men one hundred and fifty dollars out of their future pay to buy equipment and some provisions. The advance pay attracted many men to sign on. However, because they had their money, many tried to escape. For that reason, before each Alaska ship left the captain would send out a select group of men from his crew to drive through the Chinese quarter in a wagon to catch the run-away Chinese. This group of men was known as the “people catchers.” For every hired Chinese man that they brought back on the ship they received fifty dollars; unfortunately, they didn’t really care if they caught the right ones. When they could not find hired men, they would just grab any Chinese man who came their way, shove him into the wagon and bring him onto the ship.

And the person caught was done for, if he were not purchased free before the ship’s departure.

"That’s what happened to your father," gloated Uncle Ting as he turned toward Huie, “and it would never have come so far if he weren’t a Jesus man! I have always said that an accident would happen, if he ceased praying to the gods. Now he will probably drown, he is not a sailor! You will soon wear a white cord in your braid, as a sign of mourning! "

Uncle Ting’s old face was filled with satisfaction as he spoke these words.

Huie saw it, and immediately he was struck with a horrible thought. He jumped on the old man, shook him by the arm and screamed with a passionately anxious voice, "Did you get the money, did you promise to go on the ship and then have my father caught to take your place?"

The boys face with pale with horror and distress.

Uncle Ting stared at him with a perplexed look. He had not thought the boy was so quick. He pushed the boy away and into a corner where he slapped him.

“I’ll teach you” he screamed angrily. “I will come for you in the summer and you will work for me. Then I will have my revenge.”

“I will never work for you,” yelled Huie, “you are a very bad man. My father was good and you took the money and had my father captured. You are bad! Bad!”

Uncle Ting shook him and hit him in the face, but Huie sobbed, “I will never go with you and I will never work for you!”

“We shall see,” said Uncle Ting, “You will come when I fetch you!”

How Huie hated him! He ran out on the balcony and threw himself on the ground blow the street lights that shone down on him. How he hated – hated – hated the evil uncle! His poor Father was far far away on the ocean and might never come back. Mother was lamenting and sobbing on her knees in front of her shrine. Little-Lin was also whimpering beside her. Huie’s cheeks burned from Uncle Ting’s beating. It was all, all of it, Uncle Ting’s fault.

“I hate Uncle Ting! I hate him!” yelled Huie. “My father was a Jesus man, and when I am older, I will also be a Jesus man, and then I will go over the ocean and tell all of the people in my Father’s homeland, China, about Jesus! And I hate Uncle Ting!”

How often had he spoken with his father about this plan for the future, and how happy they had been in the thought of it! Why did this thought not fill him with the same pleasure now? Was it his hatred against Uncle Ting that cast a shadow over these plans? “I cannot love him, I cannot do it!” sobbed Huie. “He has sent away my father! Never, under no circumstances will Uncle Ting go to heaven!”

But, gradually his anxious emotions became calmer. Inwardly Huie heard a voice in his heart that whispered to him, “Can you ever become a good Jesus man like your father if you hate Uncle Ting?”

Had Father already forgiven Uncle Ting while out on the ocean. Huie sat upright. “Whatever Father does, Huie will do too. If Father comes back and says, ‘I have forgiven Uncle Ting,’ then I want to too,” he said to himself. “But, if Father doesn’t come back, then I will never, ever forgive him!”

He jumped up and ran back to Mother. She was crying and lamenting in front of the idol shrine. As he watched her, a feeling of manly responsibility crept into his heart- he wanted to provide for his mother.

“I will not go with my Uncle Ting,” he firmly decided. “I will stay by my Mother always.” But then he envisioned Uncle Ting’s horrible face before him and heard his resounding voice, “You will come when I fetch you!” Oh, but he was only twelve years old! Fear crept into his courageous little heart.

Weeks went by. Mother sat day and night sewing ribbon onto buttons or lying before the idol shrine weeping and praying- but Father didn’t come home.

The missionary woman, whom Huie entrusted with his troubles, came from time to time, but mother did not listen much to her. Didn’t Uncle Ting say that all these troubles had come over them because Father was a Jesus man.

Then came a sad afternoon. – Huie was busy feeding rice to Little-Lin with red “kwai-tze” (chop sticks), when the ugly old Uncle Ting came banging up the stairs. “Now I am taking you with me, and you will work for me!” he said in a rough tone of voice.

“No, no!” yelled Huie, and “No!” yelled his mother too. She would be so much lonelier without her oldest.

But it made no difference and Uncle Ting shoved the boy forward, hitting and kicking all the way. And all their protests were in vain. Huie hardly had time to bid his mother and Little-Lin farewell.

He was already out on the street marching with a small bundle in hand in which he had hastily packed the most essential pieces of clothing. But instead of going to his uncle’s part of town, they went to the railroad station, where other Chinese were already waiting with their luggage.

Then the train came. What had Uncle Ting planned to do with him? Would Huie ever come back? Would he ever see Mother and Little-Lin again? While he was thinking this, a shock ran through the boy’s heart as he was shoved in the railcar, and it went along – for hours. Finally Uncle Ting and the other Chinese stood up and grabbed their baskets – the train stopped – and they climbed out.

Huie looked around amazed. What a strange place! He had never seen such things before. The whole landscape consisted of a giant field with a large, yellowish red patch in the middle. A delicious aroma filled the fresh country air. As Huie came nearer, he discovered that the smell came from peaches drying on top of boards in the sun. He saw men keeping themselves busy, going here and there, and in front of a house, across from him, Huie also saw few women. The whole world appeared to be full of peaches.

Actually this was not such a terrible place where Uncle Ting had brought him. If he only knew what to do!

There Huie saw a tall building and out of it came the uniform sound of a machine. Further back stood an entire row of white tents.

A small American jumped out of one of the tents. He was approximately Huie’s age. “Hello! Are you coming to work also?” He shouted. Huie did not dare to answer him. The white young boy ate a peach and he also threw one to Huie. But it fell on the ground and Uncle Ting pushed Huie further forwards.

Then they came to the building, from which Huie had heard the sound. It was a tall, old, half dilapidated house. Outside lay all kinds of Chinese clothing and things. Inside many Chinese were at work. Finally Huie learned what kind of work he should do for his uncle and viewed his future place of work. Uncle Ting went with him into the house. There in rows stood many banks and tables that filled almost one third of the room. White women and girls were sitting along the benches cutting apples and peaches into little pieces. Here and there a young boy was sitting beside the women. A few girls were mashing plums.

A loud monotonous noise filled the whole room. Huie soon found its source – a massive machine standing in the corner. It was powered by men who turned it in order to squash apples and peaches.

A man was pitting peaches and throwing them into a big boiler, which had holes in it where the peaches would come out.

Huie’s escort led him to another part of the spacious room where the fruits were being preserved. Here boys and girls were standing in long rows and filling cans with fruit as fast as they possibly could. Dozens of filled cans were already standing there, stacked on top of each other. A few Chinese men were busy closing the filled cans. The finished cans were then loaded onto a cart that was made out of two long wooden trays

with wheels underneath. When the cart was full, a Chinese worker rolled it to a large, rectangular tank full of hot water.

Directly above this tank was a wheel that was wrapped with a wide, iron tire. This wheel lifted one of the wooden trays. The man directed the tray over the top of the tank let the whole heavy tray with all its cans drop into the boiling, fizzling water. Then after five minutes the cans were taken out.

Uncle Ting along with the other Chinese had to seal the cans. Huie had to carry the trays of cut up apples to the girls outside, or if he wasn't needed there, then he had to push the sealed cans over to the big water kettle.

"I'll get all the money that you earn," said uncle Ting, "you'll never get to see a penny of it."

The child didn't answer. "Later I will send your mother back to China and you will never see her again. She shall never become a Jesus-woman. I will always keep you here and you must work for me. You will also never see Little-Lin again."

Huie still gave no answer. It was awful and loud in the working area. The boy's heart was so heavy and it hurt him so much that it was as if it had broken in two. He didn't doubt that Uncle Ting would follow through on all his threats, yes, that he would even send Mother and Little-Lin to China using Huie's well-earned money.

"Oh, if only Father were back!"

Uncle Ting shoved him. "March, get to work!" he shouted at him.

Huie rushed into the entry way where the steam engine stood. On one end of the machine was an opening, out of which little apple pieces, dried and pressed, came out in a great stream. An Indian, who handled the machine, showed the boy how he should catch the little apple pieces in boxes and on boards.

How good it was for the little Chinese boy that he had to run and work diligently, otherwise he would collapse from pure misery and sorrow.

Then he had to drag the cans with the little apple pieces to the girls outside at the troughs. One girl smiled kindly at the small Chinese boy. Oh, how he longed to hide his face in her apron and sob to his heart's content.

Again and again the same thought ran through his poor, tired head. "Will Mother really go to China? She will never hear of Jesus there – never become a Jesus woman. Huie would have to grow up fast so that he could go to his mother and tell her and the other Chinese about the Savior. How father had prayed that mother would become a Christian!"

After several difficult workdays, Sunday arrived and the workhouse was closed. Every now and then, a bell sounded in the small village. On top a hill stood a white church.

Huie heard the ringing, and new hope entered into his poor, passionate heart. "Here there were Christians." Anxiously he looked around for Uncle Ting.

He got ready very quietly and slipped away. However, one of the other Chinese saw him leave.

A number of children already climbed up the hill to the Sunday school. Huie followed them and shyly took a seat in the back corner.

"Look at the little Chinese kid, look at the little Chinese kid," the white children whispered to each other. The leader of the Sunday school came to Huie and smiled at

him: "Come, I will escort you to the boy's group," she said. Huie followed her. The teacher of the boys was a woman. She kindly shook Huie's hand and cleared a place for him.

"Will you come every Sunday now?" she asked smiling.

"Every Sunday?" Huie was silent. What would Uncle Ting do with him for even coming just this one time?

The children's religious service started and Huie sat up straight. Warmth and happiness surrounded his heart. The other boys pulled on his braid during the service; and even tied it to the chair. However, the boy who had thrown him a peach earlier said, "You leave him alone or I'll tell the mother." Huie noticed that the "mother" was the leader of the Sunday school. "How wonderful it must be to have a Christian mother," he thought.

Even though she wasn't Christian, the longing for his mother returned to his heart. She was all that he had, and Uncle Ting said that he would never see her again.

After Sunday school, the Pastor came up to Huie and shook his hand. He was a big, friendly-looking man, who lived with his wife and small son in a small tent next to the church. Huie saw the little boy.

"Do you know about Jesus?" asked the Pastor's wife. Huie, the little Chinese boy nodded.

"I – Jesus sheep" he replied. "Really?" questioned the Pastor's wife somewhat startled by his answer.

During the church service, she let him sit next to her and her little boy. At one point, the little boy grabbed Huie's hand.

His hand felt a lot like Little-Lin's small pudgy hands back at home. Huie felt as if something was binding his throat and it was hard for him to swallow.

The Pastor preached and the people sang. Huie didn't understand everything, but he felt really happy. Suddenly, he heard a voice in his heart that whispered, "If you want to be one of Jesus' disciples, then you need to forgive Uncle Ting".

A struggle began in his boyish heart. He didn't even try to understand what the Pastor said anymore. He had enough going on within himself. By and by, he started to pray silently inside: "Jesus, help me to forgive Uncle Ting."

The Pastor's chubby little boy fell asleep and let his head sink onto Huie's arm. Huie continued to pray. Yes, he wanted to forgive Uncle Ting, and if Uncle Ting had such a hard heart—the poor Uncle would certainly never get to heaven, if he didn't repent for being so mean. Huie wanted to go right home and make his Uncle some delicious rice.

The meeting came to an end, and Huie rushed home. His heart was completely full. He was so happy, because he could now forgive.

But Uncle Ting had since awoken. As soon as the boy stepped inside, Uncle Ting grabbed him. "You—you were in the church?" he cried angrily. "You aren't ever allowed to go into the Jesus church again!" He attacked Huie until one of the Chinese tore the child away from him. If the child was abused any further, he wouldn't be able to work tomorrow, and Uncle Ting would lose money.

Sobbing, the mistreated child went into the corner and laid himself on top of a bundle of straw. But, even there he had to think about the Sunday school and all he had

heard: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" still rung in his ears. The pastor had told them this was how the Savior had prayed.

The whole next week Huie worked faithfully in the hot factory. The next Sunday came along, and Uncle Ting lay like he usually did in his opium-induced sleep. Again the church bells sounded on top of the small hill.

Huie timidly looked at his sleeping uncle. The welts and spots of the past Sunday still hurt. But, the bell's sounds attracted him to the church, and Huie got ready and went yet again to the small, white church on top of the hill.

The boys in the Sunday School smiled at him. No one knew that he had been beaten for going to Sunday School.

Today was Mission Sunday. Huie did not know what that meant, but the teacher had a whole lot of little tins. She called them "Penny tins" and she gave all of the boys a tin.

"You all earn something over there in the factory," she said. "Don't you all want to put something in the tin to help send missionaries to China?" She explained it again and Huie listened attentively to understand a little bit better.

White people should go over to China to tell the Chinese about Jesus. If only he could get some of his wages to put into the tin! How wonderful would it be if Huie's money could help missionaries get to China, then a missionary could teach his mother, if Uncle Ting sent his mother away to China. Then, of course, mother would hear about Jesus and did not need to wait until Huie was a man.

Huie pressed his penny tin firmly against himself. If he could only earn some money, it would soon be full. Yet he knew that Uncle Ting would never give him anything—never!

The teacher did not think that Huie had understood her, but she gave him a penny tin like every other boy so that he would not feel bad.

After church, a few of the boys threw their tins around; one boy even stepped on his till it broke in two, but Huie hid his tin in his sleeve.

Huie reached the house filled with fear and his heart sank when he saw that Uncle Ting has already awakened from his nap. But this time, Huie did not get hit. Trembling, the child went into the next room as Uncle Ting's eyes looked at him so treacherous and evil.

The next day, and the day after that, went by and nothing happened. Would he get away with going to the Jesus Church again without getting punished by Uncle Ting? He felt relieved.

One evening, Huie and Uncle Ting were quite alone in the work room. Everyone else had gone home.

Until nine o'clock the maids had stood next to the trough and now the floor needed to be cleaned. Somebody had spilled half a box of blueberries, and Huie had to wash the juice off of the floor. He scrubbed very efficiently until every spot was gone. He was very tired after this hard day.

He stood there and scrutinized the floor. Then two strong arms suddenly seized him and Uncle Ting dragged him to a big deep kettle filled with hot water. Before he knew it, he was strapped to the great wheel over the Kettle, and before the lad realized what was happening, he was suspended over the boiling hot water.

A terrifying scream rang out from his breast as he saw himself get closer and closer to the surface of the water, as if he were nothing but a layer of cans.

But the wheel stopped in such a way that Huie's face was positioned downward. Steam rose from the water.

"Are you a Christian?" asked Uncle Ting. "Yes" answered Huie. Uncle Ting turned the wheel farther until Huie's braid fell forward and dipped into the water.

The boy struggled to keep himself above the water. His hands touched the water. Oh, how it hurt. The water was terribly hot.

Uncle Ting turned the wheel back a little. "Would you like to pray to the Gods?" he cried.

"No," answered Huie's in a trembling voice.

He swung the wheel down. His tied-up hands above his head went under the water.

No, no—it could not be that Uncle Ting would drown him in the boiling hot water. Huie screamed as loud as he could. Uncle Ting pulled him up a little bit.

Suddenly there was a sound of rushing footsteps, and then a voice called: "Here, here! What is going on here? What has happened?"

It was the supervisor who had come back for some unknown reason and now lunged at Uncle Ting and threw him to the ground. Then Huie lost consciousness.

When he came to, he was lying in the Pastor's tent and the pastor's wife was crying and she was bandaging his wounds. Her little boy was stroking Huie's face and his fat little fingers felt like Little-Lin's.

"You poor, poor child," said the friendly woman to the boy. Huie lay there and struggled against his tears. His whole body was filled with horrible pain.

"You should not be afraid. You will stay here with us. The supervisor fired your uncle", the Pastor's wife explained.

Suddenly a new fear gripped the boy. Surely Uncle Ting would avenge himself on his mother and Little-Lin. He will do something terrible to them or send them to China. Shaking and sobbing, Huie tried to explain what he was afraid of.

"Where does your mother live?" asked the Pastor and Huie tried to describe the place and the little room in which his mother and Little-Lin lived.

The next morning, the clergyman went away. — When he returned after some time, he brought good news. He had really found Huie's Mother and Little-Lin. They were now safe in a mission house, and Father would find them there when he came back. Yes, even the pastor firmly believed, that God would care for Father and bring him back home.

As soon as Huie would be healthy again, he could then continue to work and a part of the money he earned could be sent to Mother and Little-Lin in the mission house. And he could live with the Pastor, his wife, and their chubby little boy in the nice tent.

Oh, how wonderful it all was! Breathless, Huie listened to all the wonderful news.

His heart leaped with joy for all the magnificent future prospects. "Mother and Little-Lin in a mission house! Oh, Mother will hear of Christ there! And Little-Lin will learn songs and verses! And when Father comes back, maybe Mother will already be a Jesus-woman! — — —"