



## RECOVERY

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Chen Sang hesitated for a moment as he ran out of the back door to the gateway. Ordinarily he would have put on a pair of shoes or his sneakers before going out into the road. But there was no time to lose. His father had told him to go quickly. As he closed the gate he could hear the baby's cry.

He ran down Queen Street and turned into Charlotte Street. He ran quickly and the wooden soles of his Sappats click-clacked on the concrete pavement, echoing through the empty street.

Here Charlotte Street was lined on both sides by two-storey buildings with signs in Chinese writing. Some of the signs were also written in English, giving the names of offices and associations.

A tall brown building on the right bore the name "*WOMINGTANG*." It was very large and stood high above the other buildings. In addition to the usual two storeys, there was a third floor and above that a garret.

Two Chinese men dressed in merinoes leaned out of a window and looked at Chen Sang out so early in the morning. Chen Sang walked past the Association to which his father belonged. He had been there many times before and liked going there. Everyone called him Acco which meant eldest son.

Just the fact that he was the eldest son in his family seemed to put him in a special position, and his brothers and sisters had to call him Acco and to show him respect. Even his cousin, Ahing, who was a whole year older, called him Acco.

Chen Sang smiled as he remembered the last time he was at the Association with his father. There were several Chinese men seated around a large table playing Marjong, which is a game like dominoes. Chen Sang was fascinated by the game especially when all the pieces, made of ivory, were turned face downwards and the players mixed them up. The sound of the ivory sliding across the top of the table was unlike anything he had ever heard.

Chen Sang watched the dealer, a stout gray-haired man, who appeared nervous but who won the game.

"That is one of the rich ones from the country,"

Chen Sang's father explained later. "He said that you brought him luck and gave me this bag of Kianchi for you."

Chen Sang was delighted and thanked the good ancestral spirits for being kind.

Thinking about the Association had caused Chen Sang to slow his pace and he now quickened his step.

He turned into an open gateway, climbed a flight of rickety steps and shook the door at the top. A bell rang noisily and Chen Sang heard the sound of soft footsteps. A tiny window opened in the door and an old man peeped at him.

Seeing Chen Sang he turned a key in the lock, removed a chain and held the door slightly ajar with his foot.

He looked at the little boy but did not speak.

"Morning Apack," Chen Sang said and handed him a slip of brown shop paper on which his father had written something.

The old man opened the door wide enough now for Chen Sang to enter and locked it again. Chen Sang followed him down a passage and into a poorly lit room, which was divided by a counter. Behind the counter were shelves stocked with boxes of all sizes. Still without speaking the old man handed the slip of paper to another man who was standing behind the counter. He too read the note, then pulling a stool towards him he stood on it in order to reach the top shelf.

He took down a large box and placed it on the counter. Inside the box were two smaller boxes and from each he poured powders into little squares of paper which he wrapped up. Then he took down a tin of Tiger Balm, placed the three articles in a paper bag and handed them to Chen Sang.

The boy thanked him and walked with the old man back along the corridor to the door. Chen Sang ran quickly down the rickety steps.

When he arrived home he could see the anxious look on his father's face. He could hear the baby crying, louder now. The baby had cried all night and their mother had not been able to soothe it.

Chen Sang handed over the parcel to his mother who immediately put the powders into a cup of boiling water and left it to cool. She opened the tin of Tiger Balm and began to massage the baby, rubbing its stomach over and over again.

"Yam Char," his father said, pointing to a cup of tea that had been set aside for him. Chen Sang joined his brothers and sisters at the table.

Already the Tiger Balm had begun to work for the baby's cries lessened. By the time Chen Sang had finished his tea, the water in which the powders had been placed was cooled and his mother gave it spoonful by spoonful to the baby. Soon the baby's cries stopped.

Chen Sang looked at his father as he placed a stick of He-ong, red Chinese incense, in a thin vase and struck a match. A little wisp of smoke carried the pleasant scent across the room. The smoke grew thicker

and curled past the little red banner with golden characters that hung on the wall. The whole room was filled with it.

Chen Sang's father stood motionless before the vase of incense and when he turned to look at his family there was a smile on his face. He sat down in his rocking chair.

Chen Sang watched the curling smoke and felt good. He was glad the baby had stopped crying. It was going to be all right.