General outline of story:  
  
Version II:  
 Lee ZhiQiang, from a wealthy family, is reluctant to be a digger of air-raid shelter in ChongQing. But he is a refugee and has lost all his money and all his contacts and has no other choice.   
 Because of his slackness and his Shanghainese accent, he is bullied by some local youths. AnDe (CalmVirtue), a giant silent youth, comes to his rescue because he had also been bullied as a nonlocal. They form a friendship. AnDe invites him to stay at his home where he meets the goodly Dad, a barber, and hears more about the war. He experiences a bomb raid and the fear of the people and himself, and begins to understand how important this work is.  
 After two months of this work, he finds himself happier and stronger and wanting to be the best digger, forgetting his privileged upbringing. The story ends when he has proven himself and is offered a post to join the Nationalist Army.

Story:

It was a hot muggy day in the summer of 1940. Near the outer wall of ChongQing, the Chinese provisional capital, a long line of sweating, bare-chested males, some men, some youths barely out their teens, were winding their way forwards towards the common water barrel. Just as ZhiQiang got to the front of the line, his unit leader ran up, shouting and pulling on his shoulder, and stopped the server from filling his cup.  
 “Hey, you! Didn’t you just get here? Your turn for water won’t come for another hour. What’s your name?” His unit leader, a young man in his mid-twenties dressed in the uniform of a corporal of the Chinese Nationalist Army, glared at him waiting for an answer.   
 “My name is Lee ZhiQiang. I just got here. I, I am sorry, I am new and I don’t know the rules here.”  
 “Well, you will have to wait for your water break. You belong to the red group and the red group gets their break at 9:30 am. Follow me now.”  
 ZhiQiang reluctantly followed the corporal into the cave from which he had emerged. He found the red group to which he belonged still working on the right tunnel of the cave. Five men with pick axes were chipping away at the cave wall, three with shovels were working at the base, while one was for shoveling the debris onto a wheelbarrow. He had also been helping with getting rid of the debris. When the wheelbarrow became full, he had also been responsible for pushing it out of the cave to the huge pile about two hundred yards outside. Even though the full wheelbarrow was heavy and there was an uphill stretch to the huge pile outside, this was actually considered the best job by the men, because the pusher got out of the constant noise and stifling heat inside the cave and breathed the outside air for a while.  
 The nearly constant sound of pick axe against stone made the noise level in the tunnel deafening. Besides the red group, he could see on his left side another group of twenty men working at it. Besides the noise, the dust from broken limestone permeated the air. This was intermingled with the smell of sweat from the men for an overpowering smell. The lantern lit the cave dimly and made fantasmographic ghostline figures of the dust swirling in the foul air.  
 This was but one of many tunnels and caves being built with people’s sweat all over ChongQing, tunnels and caves which would be used as bomb shelters for the civilians of ChongQing. This was the summer of 1939. The Japanese army had conquered Shanghai two years earlier. The Nationalist government of China was forced to retreat from the capital Nanjing in December of that year, leaving that city’s citizens to be slaughtered and raped indiscriminately in one of World War II’s worst massacres. The fleeing government settled in Wuhan, only to be chased out a few months later in Oct. 1938, whence it settled in ChongQing, once the capital of China in ancient times.   
 Surrounded on all sides by high ragged mountains, and accessible only by boat, Japanese ground forces could not easily attack ChongQing. In an attempt to force the Nationalist government of China to surrender, the Japanese high command decided to launch a campaign of terror from the air. Hundreds of bombers escorted by fighters came over the mountains. They carried high explosive as well as incendiary bombs which were dropped on military and government facilities, but also, in a repeat of tactics in Shanghai, Nanjing and Wuhan, on civilian districts with the express goal of terrorizing and demoralizing the entire populace. Small groups of bombers came night and day, spaced in three of four hours apart, to maximally disrupt any normal activities.  
 Their air force all but destroyed in the battles for Shanghai, the Nationalist government could not launch an effective fighter force to prevent these bombing attacks. All that could be done to minimize the number of civilian deaths was to build an early warning system and many thousands of bomb shelters throughout ChongQing.   
 As the ruthless Japanese bombing attacks continued, the people of ChongQing relied on their bomb shelters for survival. They did not have any weapons to fight the enemy actively, but their stubborn desire not to give in to the will of the invader, in no small part aided by the presence of many bomb shelters, their basic universal human desire to live freely from the enemy’s cruel and inhumane rule, formed a bulwark, invisible, that served to buttress the visible mountain walls surrounding ChongQing.  
 In time, the civilians came to celebrate the many civilian officials and military personnel who organized the building of shelters. At the completion of a bomb shelter located in the city near a tea house, the restaurant owner had given all the workers a free lunch of rice, chicken and dumplings. Occasionally teachers would organize teams of high school students to bring tea and fruits to the workers at one or other shelter.   
 ZhiQiang was certainly aware of the importance of the bomb shelter work he had been engaged in doing. Being a refugee from Shanghai, he had seen the destruction wreaked by Japanese bombers in many small towns all along his tortuous journey across central and south China, no more than one or two steps ahead of the marauding Japanese army. Nonetheless, he felt that fate had dealt him a very poor hand in forcing him to take on the labours of essentially a coolie. The fact that this coolie’s work was part of a giant Chinese patriotic tide that is later years might even be commemorated meant little to him.  
 All he could think about was the good life he had been forced to leave behind in Shanghai. His family consisted of only his father and himself. But they lived in a large apartment with six bedrooms. They had a cook and a maid who tended to all their daily needs. Lunch was always ready at noon and dinner served at 7 pm. Their cook had come to Shanghai from their common ancestral county and had worked for them for all of his life. She knew all his favorite food from the days when he was just a child, and since his father was seldom home for meals, she aimed primarily to please him at every meal. The other maid was almost like his surrogate mother, since his birth mother had died of tuberculosis when he was only three and a half. She was the one who taught him how to use chopsticks and how to brush his teeth properly and how to dress himself. During his elementary school days, she was the one who walked him every morning the six blocks to school, and who waited outside school at day’s end, rain, snow or shine. Throughout middle school she acted as his informal tutor. Though she only had a sixth grade formal education, she had learned enough from reading newspapers and listening to the radio to act as his tutor. By the time he entered high school, she could no longer really help him academically, but her reminders about keeping up with homework or exam dates, plus his wish not to displease this woman who treated him as if he were her own, kept his school grades up, something which his father did pay attention to every time a report card came home.   
 By the time he started his junior year at University at age twenty, her role was more like his personal valet and secretary. He liked to wear fashionable western style pants and shirts, and she kept these washed and ironed neatly, and no matter if he had tried on five different shirts and 3 different pairs of pants, carelessly discarding them on the floor afterwards, everything was folded and hung up neatly by the next day. She studiously kept a log of all his telephone messages, and kept track of the many social gatherings he was invited to where he met with the offspring of other well-to-do families in a diary, though lately, he had some dates he preferred not to tell her. He had met some new friends who liked to go play billiards and then go to a private club where they could have dances with some pretty white Russian girls.   
 Other than keeping up his grades at university, which his father insisted on, and which required not too great an effort since ZhiQiang was bright and had always been a good student, he really had it good. All his daily needs were met by two maids and he hardly had to lift a finger.   
 Everything came to an abrupt halt one summer day about a year ago when he was awakened from a pleasant afternoon nap by rapid knocks on his bedroom door. As his sleepy head cleared, he heard his father’s urgent voice. “ZhiQiang, ZhiQiang, are you there? Come on out, I need to talk to you”. His father was almost never at home this time of afternoon, and his tone of voice betrayed his distress. One look at his father’s sweaty, almost ashen face and ZhiQiang knew that something was desperately wrong. ZhiQiang guessed that whatever the trouble was, it probably had something to do with Li Du, the “businessman” ---- many say mobster ---- who was the financial backer for his father’s gambling house and in all ways that counted, his father’s boss.   
 “ZhiQiang, sit down and listen to me” His father pulled him to the living room sofa and sat him down.  
 “ZhiQiang, I could be in hot soup with the Japanese devils and this time, even Boss Li may not be able to get me out of their gunsights.” His father breathlessly began.  
 “What happened? What did you do, dad?”  
 “Never mind. The less you know the better. What is important now is your safety. If they come get me or worse, I don’t want you here. You have to leave Shanghai immediately.”  
 “Dad, come with me. If it is dangerous, you have to leave too!” ZhiQiang pleaded.   
 “I can’t. I have to try to clear up this mess, or else I stand to lose everything I have built up all these years. Listen, listen, it might still be possible if Boss Li’s is able to persuade his connection to intercede for me with the Japanese devils. Then I can run my business as before and we shall be fine. When all things are settled, I will call you back.” His father explained in a rush. Expressing the hope that the situation might be remedied, his demeanor lightened a little for a few seconds, then it darkened again.  
 “Dad, let me stay here. Perhaps I can help.”  
 “No, no, no, the risk is too great because those bastards are merciless. Listen to me, if they choose to make an example of me, they won’t stop at just me ……” His father’s voice trailed off.  
 ZhiQiang understood. Everyone in Shanghai knew from newspaper reports how the Japanese mobsters removed enemies, sometimes just because the supposed enemy had caused the mobster to lose face. Entire households from the youngest to the eldest were beaten up, male heirs had their legs broken, and teenage daughters were kidnapped and sold into sex slavery. Being the only son, ZhiQiang had little hope of escaping retribution in Shanghai if his father was targeted.  
 “Listen. I have contacted your uncle, your mother’s younger brother, who has agreed to take you in for a while. He lives in WuChang. If you can get on a train, it is only a day away. This is his address”. His father brought out a crumpled piece of paper on which was scrawled his uncle’s street address.  
 “Who is he? Is this the uncle that I have not seen since I was 5 or 6. I don’t really know him, and he .….” ZhiQiang protested. But his father interrupted, “Precisely, hardly anyone knows about him since your mother’s passing. No one would be able to find you if you stayed with him.”   
 ZhiQiang could not argue with this logic. His father proceeded to give him instructions about escaping from Shanghai. He had already arranged for ZhiQiang to be smuggled by boat. This was much safer than trying to leave by train. There were a limited number of train stations, and they were all watched very carefully by government agents, Japanese spies as well as gangsters. On the other hand, there were many, many piers and small coves along the shores of the Whampoa river from which a traveler could slip away on a small boat, as long as the price was right.   
 ZhiQiang left Shanghai that night. There was a part of him that welcomed this adventure, this start of almost a new life. And yet, this was a more terrifying and eye-opening adventure than he could ever have imagined. Everywhere he went, he saw the devastation and fear wrought upon the general populace by the relentless Japanese invaders. He saw villages in ruins, their inhabitants now a pile of corpses by some ditch that they had been forced to dig. He saw abandoned children begging at every railroad stop, some as young as five or six but now forced to fend for themselves. He saw refugees forced off the road by Chinese soldiers who had to clear the way to rush to the front. These soldiers were the people’s protectors from the cruel and barbarous invaders, and yet, sometimes, they beat civilians ruthlessly just as ruthlessly as the Japanese invaders. He saw the fear in people’s eyes when unopposed Japanese bombers dropped their deadly cargoes of bombs among helpless refugees. He saw the terrible aftermath: twisted bodies, disconnected body parts and limbs strewn about sometimes, nothing but a bloody tattered shirt or pair of pants, the only thing that remained of their wearers.   
 ZhiQiang saw and heard things that would have aged any one, certainly one who had had a privileged life as he. But the constant need to move, to improvise to get to the next destination, kept him focused on his task and away from deeper ruminations, and ironically saved him mentally. He quickly learned to offer a bribe to the conductor if he wanted to get on any train. He quickly learned that unless he was willing to go hungry, he had to pay the equivalent of a 5-course meal in Shanghai for a bowl of bug-infested rice or a pork bun. He learned to steer clear of thieves and the many hucksters who would offer to give him instructions for his next leg with the sole intention of leading him to some out of the way location to rob him. He kept his money in a pouch underneath his shirt and would only get some out in secrecy.   
 It took him almost ten days to get to Wuhan, by which time he had used up most of his money. He thought he would now find a temporary safe haven, but his heart sank when he arrived at the address of his uncle. There was nothing but rubble where his uncle’s small house had lain. He tried to ask the neighbours across the street where his uncle and family may have gone, but no one gave him the time of day. They were all rushing about, getting ready to leave themselves. Finally he was able to corner an elderly woman who told him that she thought they had left for Chungking, but she did not have an address of any other information.  
 Not knowing how to contact his father nor knowing where else to go, ZhiQiang decided that he would try to follow his uncle and the mass of refugees to ChungKing. It was another week before he finally reached ChungKing. By then he was down to his last fifty renminbi, which he knew might be enough for perhaps 2 days’ meals but not more.   
 Wartime Chungking’s population had swelled by a factor of 4 to a million due to the influx of refugees from all over eastern China. ZhiQiang thought he could find out the whereabouts of his uncle by contacting the fraternal organization for his home province. He was able to locate the office of the fraternal organization without much problem, in a building that housed dozens of such offices for people from Anhui, Suzhou, etc.. He was one of thousands who jostled their way in with the hope of finding the whereabouts of a lost husband or wife or father or mother. When he finally made his way to the clerk’s desk, strangers still pressed on him from both sides. The clerk, by now immune to the chaos and rush of people around him, calmly asked him to write down his and his uncle’s full names , which he did. Then he passed it to a colleague who went into the back part of the room where there were files of registered people. ZhiQiang waited anxiously for about fifteen minutes before another clerk called him forward. They were not able to locate his uncle’s name, but did he want to register his name and place of birth?   
 The only thing remaining for ZhiQiang to do now was to go around various central squares and bus stations, and river side piers where various walls had been appropriated for posting notes. By the end of the second day, he had traipsed through most of Chungking’s central area. Foot weary, and tired from only getting sleep by the river, ZhiQiang came to the realization that he was not going to find his uncle any time soon even if his uncle was here. He had no more money left.  
 During his search, he had seen many posters advertising for strong young men for paid work organized by the ChungKing city defence forces, as part of their effort to support the national government in their fight against Japanese oppressors. ZhiQiang reported to a recruiting station, and was soon directed to show up for work at 8 am in the morning.  
 This is how he ended up in his present work crew.   
 While it was not the kind of work he desired