

"My mother."

"Your mother? She can't know how to use a pen. Did you ever hear such a lie----"

"I do not lie."

"Not lie? Hold your tongue! As if your mother knows how to write----" And she looked rather sulkily at Sandu, who moved on to the other pile of stretching-pegs.

At this moment one of the workmen told her that the letter really was from his mother, but that it was written by a Chinaman in the village.

"Then why didn't he tell me?" she cried. "Am I supposed to know everything?" Sandu turned round. "But can you read?"

"Yes, mistress, I can."

"It's a good thing you can."

The mistress went away and the men were busy with their work till dinner-time.

Sandu lingered over his letter. When he went indoors the mistress could not resist having one or two hits at him. But Sandu scarcely understood her; his mother thanked him with all her heart, and he was so full of joy that even had the mistress struck him he would have felt nothing of it. He ate of the food, but he could not have told if he were satisfied or hungry when he got up from the table, and he worked like a nigger till the evening.

In bed, with his hands beneath his head, many thoughts crossed his mind. Three years had passed since last he saw his mother. He had often longed for her when he was in the army, but only from time to time had he received news of her. He had left her old and poor.

"And longing for me will have aged her a great deal more," he said to himself, and his heart was heavy when he thought he could not go to see her. "How good it would be if I could go and see her at Christmas! In the meantime I must send more money to give her pleasure and console her."

And he fancied how she would cry with joy when she got the money, and how she would pray God to lengthen his life and give him success and happiness.

And he seemed to feel himself close to her, and he seemed to hear the whisper of sweet comforting words.

Wrapped in such thoughts as these he fell asleep.

The next day God sent glorious weather, and Sandu beat the skins carefully and often that they might dry quickly.

But no matter what trouble he and the other men took, the skins would not dry, and Master Dinu could not begin the cutting out till next day; the cutting out and trimming goes quickly when one has everything close at hand, and some one to help one, and Master Dinu began to cut out and to trim. But the damping, oiling, thickening and sewing of the sandals and straps was difficult and tedious.

There being great need of haste, Master Dinu told his wife to call Ana, their daughter, that she might help to damp the sandals.

The mistress, who was holding the skins to make it easier for Dinu to cut out the straps, and trim them after cutting out, put her hands on her hips and looked at her husband.

"What, my Ana damp the sandals?"