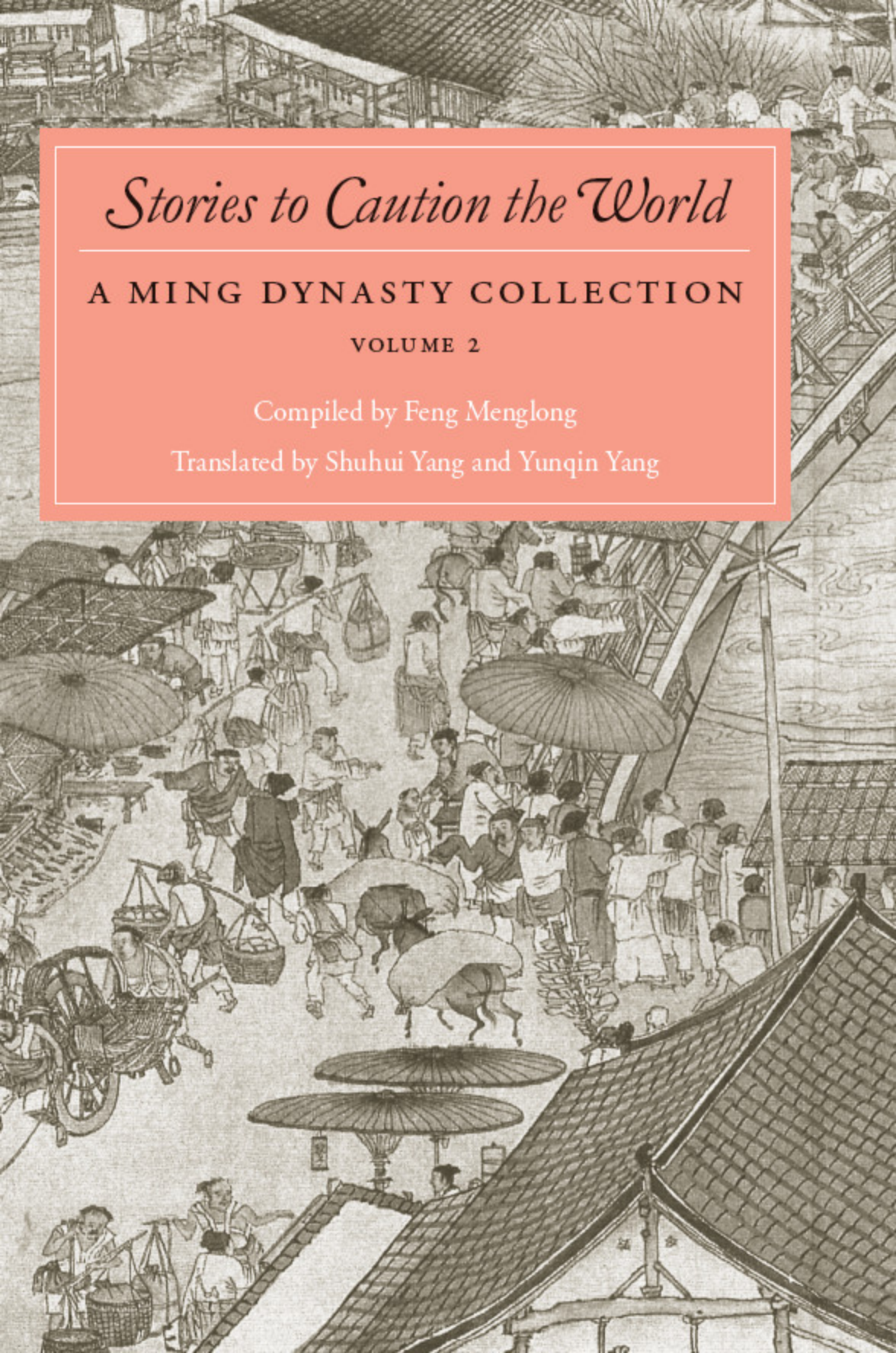
Stories to Caution the World

A MING DYNASTY COLLECTION

VOLUME 2

Compiled by Feng Menglong

Translated by Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang



Stories to Caution the World

警世通言

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To our parents and sisters

Contents

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Introduction

Stories to Caution the World (Jingshi tongyan), more commonly known in English as *Comprehensive Words to Warn the World,* was published in Jinling, present-day Nanjing, in 1624. It is the second of three celebrated Ming dynasty (1368–1644) collections of stories; the first is *Stories Old and New* (Gujin xiaoshuo; 1620), and the third is *Constant Words to Awaken the World* (Xingshi hengyan; 1627). Each collection contains forty stories, and since *Stories Old and New* is also known as *Illustrious Words to Instruct the World* (Yushi mingyan), the three books are most often referred to collectively as the *Sanyan* (Three words), from the Chinese character *yan* at the end of each title.[1]

The *Sanyan* collections were edited by Feng Menglong (1574–1646), the most knowledgeable connoisseur of popular literature of his time. He came from a well-to-do, educated family in exceptionally prosperous Suzhou Prefecture, one of the great cultural centers of Ming (1368–1644) China. Feng acquired the preliminary academic degree of *shengyuan* when he was about twenty but apparently had no further luck in the civil service examinations, in spite of his erudition and great literary fame. Finally, in 1630, at the age of fifty-six or fifty-seven, he seems to have lost hope that he would pass the examinations and decided instead to take the alternative route to office by accepting the status of tribute student.[2] He then served one term as assistant instructor in Dantu County (about ninety miles northwest of Suzhou), probably from 1631 to 1634, before he was promoted to a minor position as magistrate of Shouning County, Fujian.[3] He held this office for four years and proved to be an honest, caring, and efficient administrator, as is registered in the *County History of Shouning* (Shouning xian zhi), compiled in the early Qing period (1644–1911). The county history also tells us that Feng "venerated literary studies more than anything else" (*shou shang wenxue*) during his service.[4] Feng's last political involvement, toward the end of his life, was his association with the Southern Ming government in its desperate resistance against the crushing forces of the Manchus. He died soon afterward in 1646 at the age of seventy-two.

Feng Menglong was one of the most prolific writers of his time. The books he published could literally be "piled up to reach his own height" (*zhuzuo dengshen*), a phrase traditionally used by critics to praise exceptionally productive writers,[5] and they covered such a wide range of interests and literary genres that Feng has been described as "presenting himself in two distinct personae, or . . . in a range of personae between two extremes."[6] At one extreme, he appears in some of his works

as the wit, the ribald humorist, the bohemian, the drinker, and the romantic lover. This is the Feng Menglong who compiled *Treasury of Jokes* (Xiaofu) and published two volumes of folk songs (*Guazhir* and *Hill Songs*), mostly on erotic or ribald themes, and whose passionate love affair with the famous Suzhou courtesan Hou Huiqing is revealed in some of his poems. At the other extreme is Feng Menglong the patriot, orthodox scholar, and ardent examination candidate, who authored at least three handbooks on the Confucian classic *The Spring and Autumn Annals,* wrote a similar handbook on the *Four Books,* and published many patriotic tracts as a consequence of his participation in Southern Ming resistance activities. These two personae may seem to be mutually exclusive, yet in his fiction as well as his plays, Feng Menglong often reveals elements of both in a single text.[7]

Modern scholars generally agree, however, that Feng Menglong's greatest contribution to literature is in the field of vernacular fiction, particularly his collecting and editing of the three *Sanyan* books of 120 vernacular short stories. This genre, known as *huaben,* is believed to have developed, along with the vernacular novel, during the Song (960–1279) and Yuan (1260–1368) dynasties and reached maturity in the late Ming. As a passionate champion of popular literature, Feng managed to rescue from oblivion a significant proportion of the early *huaben* stories by making them available to the public again. But preservation of existing stories was by no means Feng Menglong's only concern—he probably was more interested in giving prestige to this new literary genre and establishing it socially. In the preface to *Stories Old and New,* he places vernacular fiction on a par with the highly esteemed classical tales of the Tang dynasty (618–907):

> *Literature and the arts have been so vigorously advanced by the imperial court of this Ming dynasty that each and every school is flourishing; in vernacular fiction alone, there is no lack of writings of a quality far above those of the Song. It is a mistake to believe, as some do, that such works lack the charm of those of the Tang. One who has a love for the peach need not forsake the apricot. Fine linen, silk gauze, plush, brocade—each has its proper occasion for wear.*

In order to elevate the status of the vernacular story, Feng Menglong also claims, in the same preface, that the origin of all fiction is the grand tradition of historiography, and he ascribes more educational and moral power to the *huaben* story than to *The Analects of Confucius* (Lunyu).[8] With the aim of substantiating such claims, Feng is believed, not surprisingly, to have extensively modified some of the stories he had collected and incorporated many of his own stories and those of some friends into the *Sanyan* collections, although he does not acknowledge authorship in the preface.[9] According to Patrick Hanan, who applied rigorous stylistic criteria in his studies of the dating and authorship of Chinese vernacular stories, Feng Menglong is the probable author of nineteen stories in *Stories Old and New,* sixteen in *Stories to Caution the World,* and one or two in *Constant Words to Awaken the World.*[10]

A less drastic but more obvious aspect of Feng's "editing" is his rearrangement

into pairs of the stories in the three collections. The thematically and grammatically parallel pairing of titles may be an attempt to parody the parallelism of classical poetry and belles lettres prose (the two most honored literary genres of Feng's time) or may simply represent his effort to elevate the vernacular short story.[11] However, on the textual level, it is clear that stories were composed with their pairings in mind.[12] The paired stories often share features of subject matter or plot line, and they occasionally contrast or comment on each other.

One of the most interesting and controversial characteristics of Chinese vernacular fiction is its "storyteller's rhetoric." This is part of what Patrick Hanan refers to as the "simulated context," or "the context of situation in which a piece of fiction claims to be transmitted."[13] In the *Sanyan* stories (and in other Chinese vernacular fiction as well), this simulacrum almost always takes the form of a professional storyteller addressing his audience. The storyteller-narrator asks questions of his simulated audience, converses with them, makes explicit references to his own stories, and intersperses his narrative with verses and poems. The narrator usually begins his talk with one or more prologue stories or poems, which supposedly allows time for his audience to gather before he presents the main piece in his performance.

Of course, in written literature, this storyteller's pose is only a pretense in which "the author and reader happily acquiesce in order that the fiction can be communicated."[14] It was a way to "naturalize, by reference to the familiar situation of hearing stories told in the vernacular by professional storytellers, the unfamiliar process of writing and reading fiction in vernacular Chinese."[15] But this formal feature, plus a misunderstanding of the term *huaben,* led many scholars of Chinese literature to subscribe, until a couple of decades ago, to the "prompt-book" theory, which held that the Chinese vernacular story developed directly from the prompt-books of marketplace storytellers in the Song dynasty and that the pre-*Sanyan* texts were genuine prompt-books written for performance in the Song and Yuan or early Ming periods.[16] W. L. Idema, however, argues that the storyteller's manner was developed deliberately in literati imitations by Feng Menglong and others. According to Idema, the conspicuous use of this rhetorical stance in the *Sanyan* collections was "a consequence mainly of Feng Menglong's reinterpretation of the genre and due to his overall rewritings."[17] In other words, Feng's editing of the collections included a systematic elaboration of this storyteller's rhetoric, which became a hallmark of the *huaben* story as he conceived of it.

This, however, is not to deny the presence of elements of oral folk literature in the *Sanyan* stories. Most contain anecdotes or episodes known even to the illiterate, which suggests that the editor looked to storytelling for raw materials as well as for rhetorical formulas. And we may assume that traces of the marketplace storyteller and the values he represented would unavoidably have remained in these *huaben* stories in spite of Feng Menglong's often meticulous editing. Idema argues that professional storytelling was but one of the many factors that helped to shape

traditional Chinese fiction.[18] Small wonder that the *Sanyan* collections provide for us such a vivid panoramic view of the bustling world of imperial China before the end of the Ming; we see not only scholars, emperors, ministers, and generals but also a gallery of ordinary men and women in their everyday surroundings—merchants and artisans, prostitutes and courtesans, matchmakers and fortune-tellers, monks and nuns, servants and maids, thieves and impostors. We learn about their joys and sorrows, likes and dislikes, their views of life and death, and even their visions of the netherworld and the supernatural.

Thus, the *Sanyan* stories are necessarily overdetermined texts, historically, ideologically, and formally. They can justifiably be taken as an intersection of complex cultural determinations, with generic mixture and multiple voices making different and sometimes conflicting claims. This complexity of multiple voices in *Stories to Caution the World* has never been fully presented to the English reader. Of the forty stories in this collection, only fourteen have been published in English translation, appearing separately in journals and anthologies of Chinese literature instead of being arranged in pairs and in the original sequence. Moreover, in these previous translations, the storyteller's rhetoric, the verses, and the prologue stories often were deleted.[19] The interlinear and marginal comments, generally believed to have been made by Feng Menglong himself, are omitted even in modern Chinese editions of the collection.[20] This volume represents the first effort to translate the second of the seventeenth-century *Sanyan* collections in its entirety. In doing so, we hope not only to provide the English reader with a fuller picture of the complex social environment of imperial China but, more important, to show the intricate interactions among different voices in the texts, especially between the voice of the conventional storyteller-narrator and that of the literati editor Feng Menglong.

Shuhui Yang

Translators' Note

This translation follows the text of the 1624 *Jianshantang* edition of *Jingshi tongyan* as reprinted in the 1987 facsimile edition by Shanghai Guji Chubanshe. In this translation, the interlinear and marginal comments in the original text appear in italic within parentheses in roman text and in roman within parentheses in italic text.

Chinese proper names are rendered in the *pinyin* system. For the convenience of those readers who are more accustomed to the Wade-Giles system of romanization, we have provided the following short list of difficult consonants:

c = ts'
q = ch'
x = hs
z = tz
zh = ch

Information about previous translations of stories in this collection (in varying degrees of completeness and accuracy) is provided in the endnotes for individual stories.

Frequently Encountered Chinese Terms

chi, a unit of measurement, translated as "foot"
jin, translated as "catty," equals half a kilogram
jinshi, one who passed the imperial civil service examinations at the metropolitan (the highest) level
li, approximately one third of a mile
liang, translated as "tael," equals one sixteenth of a *jin*
mu, roughly one sixth of an acre
shi, a married woman known by her maiden name (e.g., Wang-shi)
xiucai, translated as "scholar," a successful candidate at the local level
zhuangyuan, a *jinshi* who ranked first in the palace examination, in which the emperor interviewed those who passed the imperial civil service examination at the metropolitan level
zi, translated as "courtesy name," the name by which an educated person was addressed by people of his or her own generation, probably used more often than an official name

For our translation of the first collection, *Stories Old and New,* published by the University of Washington Press in 2000, we obtained copies of illustrations from the 1620 Chinese edition of *Stories Old and New* from the Imperial Diet Library of Japan. Much to our regret, however, we were not able to obtain reproducible copies of illustrations for this volume.

Chronology of Chinese Dynasties

Xia	ca. 2100–ca. 1600 B.C.E.
Shang (Yin)	ca. 1600–ca. 1028 B.C.E.
Zhou	ca. 1027–ca. 256 B.C.E.
Western Zhou	ca. 1027–771 B.C.E.
Eastern Zhou	770–256 B.C.E.
Spring and Autumn	770–476 B.C.E.
Warring States	475–221 B.C.E.
Qin	221–207 B.C.E.
Han	206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.
Western Han	206 B.C.E.–8 C.E.
Xin	9–25
Eastern Han	25–220
Three Kingdoms	220–80
Wei	220–65
Shu	221–63
Wu	222–80
Six Dynasties (Wu, Eastern Jin, Former Song, Southern Qi, Southern Liang, and Southern Chen)	222–589
Jin	265–420
Western Jin	265–316
Eastern Jin	317–420
Southern and Northern Dynasties	420–589
Southern Dynasties	
Former Song	420–79
Southern Qi	479–502
Southern Liang	502–57
Southern Chen	557–89
Northern Dynasties	
Northern Wei	386–534
Eastern Wei	534–50
Western Wei	535–56
Northern Qi	550–77
Northern Zhou	557–81

Sui	581–618
Tang	618–907
Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms	907–79
Five Dynasties	
Later Liang	907–23
Later Tang	923–36
Later Jin	936–46
Later Han	947–50
Later Zhou	951–60
Ten Kingdoms	907–79
Liao (Khitan)	916–1125
Song	960–1279
Northern Song	960–1126
Southern Song	1127–1279
Xixia (Tangut)	1038–1227
Jin (Jurchen)	1115–1234
Yuan (Mongol)	1260–1368
Ming	1368–1644
Qing (Manchu)	1644–1911

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

[IN THE 1624 EDITION]

Even those committed to the most rigorous scholarship have always included unofficial histories in their studies. It is no wonder, then, that the lower classes find popular historical romances most appealing. However, for those profit-driven individuals who offend decency by seeking out only narratives that are lewd and obscene, this publishing house has nothing but the utmost disdain. Under personal instructions from the Master of the Pingping Studio, we dare not fill these volumes with anything other than words that caution and enlighten the world. As was the wish of the late venerable one dedicated to the edification of the mind, we hope that these volumes will be looked upon favorably by members of the literati as well.

The Jianshan Publishing House of Jinling [present-day Nanjing]

Preface [to the 1624 edition]

Do all historical romances give true accounts of history? The answer is "Not necessarily." Are they all untrue, then? "Not necessarily." Should all that is untrue be done away with, and only what is true be preserved? "Not necessarily, either."

The Six Classics,[1] *The Analects* [of Confucius], and *Mencius,* about which commentaries abound, are, in summary, nothing but exhortations for ministers to be loyal, children to be filial, officials to be judicious, friends to be trustworthy, husbands to be honorable, wives to be chaste, scholars to be paragons of virtue, and families to do good deeds. The classics state the universal truths, and the histories serve the same purpose through narrating the events. Yet, the universal truths are explained to a world inhabited not exclusively by venerable men who diligently compare notes with each other in their moral pursuits, and the histories are narrated to a world consisting not exclusively of erudite scholars of impeccable moral behavior. And since villagers, children, ordinary women, and peddlers are easily stirred to joy or wrath by what others do rightly or wrongly, take guidance in their actions from stories about the operations of karma, and gain knowledge from hearsay and gossip, popular historical romances can well serve as supplements where the classics and the histories are found lacking.

One may say, "Just as home-brewed wine and meat bought from the village market are not good enough for the banquet table, such romances are nothing but vulgar absurdities."

Alas! The *fu* prose poems [about fictional characters] "Daren fu" (The Mighty One) and "Zixu fu" (Sir Fantasy), with the words of advice voiced toward the very end, stand unrivaled in their moral elevation.[2] Real historical figures do not have to be tied to real events, nor do real historical events have to be attributed to real names. What is real can be added to the archives of the imperial libraries, and what is unreal can inspire, edify, and profoundly move the audience. There is truth in what is real, but there is also truth in what is unreal. If there is no offense against decency, no deviation from the teachings of the sages, and no breach of the morals taught by classics such as *The Book of Songs* and *The Book of History,* why should such romances be done away with?

A neighbor's boy cut his finger when helping out in the kitchen. To comments of surprise that he did not let out cries of pain, the boy replied, "I just came back from Xuanmiao Temple, where I heard a storyteller tell about how Guan Yu [d.

220] of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* went on talking and laughing when a surgeon was scraping infection from a bone in his arm. Now, this little pain of mine is really nothing!" From the fact that a story about Guan Yu fills a boy with such courage, we can infer that stories about filial piety, loyalty, fidelity, and righteousness do foster these virtues in the audience, and that they strike deep chords in the audience and awaken their genuine feelings. When such stories are compared with the writings of those venerable men and erudite scholars of impeccable moral behavior, writings that are stylish and ornate but without feeling and substance, who can tell which are real and which are unreal?

I met a most extraordinary gentleman from west of the Long Mountains at the House on the Hill amid Rosy Clouds, a man with whom I formed a profound friendship the very first time we met.[3] We talked about our travels, and then, in the course of drinking, he produced several newly printed volumes of books and said, "These volumes are not really complete as yet, but would you be so kind as to give them a title?" Upon reading the volumes, I found them to consist mostly of words not unlike those spoken by monks in explanation of the operations of karma to save the souls of the people in this world. Just like home-brewed wine and meat bought from the village market, they provide nourishment for the masses. I therefore gave the volumes the title *Stories to Caution the World* [lit., Comprehensive words to caution the world] and urged that they be published.

Recluse Sans Souci of Yuzhang [present-day Nanchang, Jiangxi]
The twelfth month of the fourth year of the Tianqi reign period [1624]

I

Yu Boya Smashes His Zither in Gratitude to an Appreciative Friend

What a lie that Bao Shu was cheated out of his silver!
Who recognized Boya's talent in playing the zither?
An evil lot are those claiming friendship nowadays,
Unworthy of loving thoughts over seas and lakes.

When it comes to friendship, none since ancient times has measured up to that between Guan Yiwu [d. 645 B.C.E.] and Bao Shuya [also known as Bao Shu].[1] When both were engaged in business dealings, they divided their profits between them. Though Guan Yiwu took the larger share of the profits, Bao did not think Guan was a greedy man, for he knew Guan to be poor. Later, when Guan Yiwu became a prisoner, it was Bao who came to his rescue and recommended that he be made prime minister of the state of Qi [during the Spring and Autumn period]. Such is the stuff of which true friendships are made.

Now there are different kinds of friends. Those who are bound together by deeds of kindness are friends who truly know each other; those who show utter devotion to each other are friends of the heart; those who find much in common with each other are friends truly appreciative of each other. They all fall into the general category of friendship.

I now propose to tell a story about a certain Yu Boya. Dear audience, those of you who would like to hear it, please lend me your ears. Those who do not want to hear it are free to do whatever you wish. Truly,

What is meant for an appreciative ear
Is not to be wasted on just anyone.

As the story goes, during the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States period, there lived a man named Yu Rui, courtesy name Boya, in Yingdu, capital of the state of Chu, in what is now Jingzhou Prefecture in Huguang.[2]

Though a native of the state of Chu, Yu Boya was destined for a career as an official in the state of Jin, where he rose to be a senior grand master. By order of the king of Jin, he went on an official visit to Chu. It was actually a mission that

he had solicited. He did so partly because, with his superior abilities, he was sure that he would acquit himself well as the king's emissary and partly because he could take the opportunity to visit his hometown, thus accomplishing two purposes at the same time. So he traveled by land to Yingdu, where he had an audience with the king of Chu and transmitted to him the message from the king of Jin, whereupon the king of Chu laid out a feast in his honor, treating him with great courtesy.

Yingdu being his hometown, Boya naturally went to visit the family graves and meet with relatives and friends. However, now that he was serving another state and was bearing orders from his king, he refrained from staying longer. As soon as his official business was over, he bade a respectful adieu to the king of Chu, who gave him gifts of gold, colored silk, and a canopied four-horse carriage.

Now, because he had been away from Chu for twelve years and missed the scenic rivers and mountains of his home state, Boya wished to make a big detour by water on his return journey so as to see the sights to his heart's content. He therefore said to the king of Chu, not in all honesty, "I have an unfortunate affliction that makes the rapid speed of carriages too much for me to bear. I humbly request permission to go by boat instead, which would make it easier for me to undergo treatment." The king of Chu approved Boya's request and ordered the navy to provide him with two big boats, one for his exclusive use as the emissary from the state of Jin and the other, of a lower ranking, for his servants and the luggage. Magnificent boats they were, with brocade canopies, tall masts, and decorated oars made of fragrant wood. The ministers of the court escorted Boya and his entourage all the way to the riverbank before they bade him farewell.

To satisfy his wish to see the sights,
He thought nothing of the distance.

Romantic scholar that he was, Boya found the sights to be all that he had hoped to enjoy. With sails unfurled, the boats rode on the undulating green waves, the distant wooded mountains and clear waters within full view. Before many days had passed, he found himself and his entourage at the mouth of Hanyang River. It was the fifteenth night of the eighth lunar month, the night of the Mid-autumn Festival. Suddenly, a storm sprang up. With waves leaping high and rain pouring down in sheets, the boats had to be moored at the foot of a hill. A while later, the wind died down, the waves subsided, the rain stopped, and the clouds cleared, revealing a bright, rain-washed moon that shone with double its usual brightness.

Sitting alone in the cabin and feeling bored, Yu Boya told his page boy, "Put some incense in that incense burner. I'm going to play my zither to express my feelings." Thereupon, the page boy lit the incense and put the zither case on the table. Boya opened the case, took out the zither, tuned it, and began to play. Before he had finished a piece, a string broke with a sharp twang. Startled, Boya told the page boy to ask the head boatman what kind of place this was. The head boatman replied,

"This is just the foot of a hill where the storm took us. There are some grass and trees around, but no houses." (*True enough.*)

Much taken by surprise, Boya thought to himself, "So, this is a deserted hill. If it were a town or a village where some intelligent person eager to learn listened secretly to my music, that would explain why the music suddenly changed in tone and why the string snapped. But in this deserted place at the foot of a hill, how can there be anyone listening to my music? Ah yes, I know. It must be an assassin sent by some enemy of mine, or it could be some robbers waiting here for the night to deepen before coming onto the boat to get my possessions." So thinking, he said to the attendants by his side, "Go ashore and look around for me. If there's no one in the depths of the willow grove, then search in the reeds."

Thus instructed, the men called out to other servants, and they all assembled, ready to use the gangplank to get to the rocky shore. At this moment, a man's voice was heard from the shore, saying, "The gentleman in the boat need not be suspicious. I am not a robber but a woodcutter. I had finished cutting firewood for the day and was on my way home after dark when I was caught in a bad storm. My rain gear not being enough to protect me from the rain, I found shelter by a rock. Then I heard the gentleman play the zither and stayed to listen."

Boya burst into laughter. "Imagine a woodcutter in the hills having the audacity to say he listens to music! Well, I won't even bother to find out whether that claim is true or not. Now, my men, tell him to leave."

Instead of leaving, the man on the rocky shore said loudly, "Sir, you've got it all wrong! Haven't you heard the sayings 'In a neighborhood of ten households, there are bound to be loyal and trustworthy people' and 'If there is a gentleman in the room, another gentleman will come to the door'? You, sir, in your contempt for these backwoods, think that no one around here would listen to music. Well, if so, there shouldn't be a zither player at the foot of a deserted hill, either."

Impressed by the man's refined speech, Boya began to think that this woodcutter might truly have been listening to his music. He told his men to quiet down and went to the cabin door. His displeasure having given way to delight, he asked, "Since the gentleman on the rocky shore has been standing and listening to my playing for quite some time, does he, by any chance, know what I was playing?"

"If I didn't know," said the man, "I wouldn't have stayed and listened. What you have been playing, sir, is a melody set to what Confucius wrote in memory of [his student] Yan Hui. The lines go like this, 'How tragic that Yan Hui died so early; / Memories of him have whitened my hair. / By living happily in poverty,'—and at this point, a string on your zither snapped before the fourth line could be played. But I remember the fourth line. It says, 'A good name he left for posterity.'"

Overjoyed upon hearing this, Boya said, "You are indeed a gentleman of culture. But it is difficult to talk with you across such a distance." Turning to his men, he said, "Put out the gangplank and the handrail and invite the gentleman to come aboard for a chat."

The servants put out the gangplank, and the man boarded the boat. He was indeed a woodcutter, with a broad-brimmed bamboo hat, a straw cape, a carrying pole with its load, an ax tied to his waist, and straw sandals on his feet. The servants, who had little appreciation for refined speech, assumed a contemptuous look at the sight of a mere woodcutter. (*Those who worship money and bully the poor and the humble don't know the good from the bad and, as such, will never rise above the servant class.*) "Hey, woodcutter!" they called out. "When you go into the cabin, be sure to kowtow to our master, and be respectful when you answer his questions. He's a highly placed official, you know."

The woodcutter was by no means of the common run. "You don't have to be so rude," he said. "Now, let me get myself ready before I go in." So saying, he took off his bamboo hat, under which was a blue cloth cap. Then he took off his straw cape, revealing a blue cloth shirt, a long bag worn around his waist, and a pair of cloth pants. All calm and collected, he put his cape and hat, his load and its carrying pole, and his ax outside the cabin door. (*What great composure! He has lost his respect for Boya by now.*) He removed his sandals, shook off the muddy water, put them on his feet again, and walked into the cabin, which was brightly lit by the candles on the emissary's writing desk.

The woodcutter bowed deeply with one hand cupped in the other before his chest but did not drop to his knees. "Greetings, sir," said he.

Being a minister in the court of Jin, Yu Boya, as a rule, would not deign to glance at a common laborer who was not wearing a robe. Now, he was afraid that to leave his seat and return the greeting would be beneath his dignity as an official, and yet, since he had already invited the man onto the boat, he could not very well drive him out. Left with no alternative, Boya lifted a hand slightly and said, "You, my good man, need not stand on ceremony." He then told his page boy to bring a seat. The page boy put a small stool in a spot usually assigned to lower-ranking people. Disregarding the usual decorum due to a guest, Boya said to the woodcutter, pushing out his lips, "You may sit." By addressing the man simply as "you," he made no secret of his unwillingness to play the good host.

Without any of the usual obligatory words of demurral, the woodcutter sat down in a dignified manner.

Slightly annoyed that the man had sat down without saying any polite words, Boya refrained from asking the man's name, nor did he instruct the servants to serve tea. After sitting silently for quite some time, he spoke up out of curiosity, "So, you are the one who was listening to my music?"

"Yes, sir."

"Let me ask you something. Since you were listening to my playing, you must know something about the history of the zither. Who invented the zither? What good does the zither do?"

Before he had finished with his questions, the head boatman came in to report

that, the wind being favorable and the moonlight as bright as day, they were ready to be on their way. But Boya said, "Wait a moment."

The woodcutter said, "I thank you, sir, for being so kind as to ask me a few questions, but if I ramble on too long, I'm afraid I will prevent you from taking advantage of the favorable wind."

Boya said with a smile, "I'm just not sure if you know anything about the zither. If what you say makes sense, I won't mind even losing my official title, let alone being delayed on my journey."

"In that case," said the woodcutter, "I will make bold to speak out of turn. The first zither was made by Fuxi.[3] He saw the essence of the five planets fly through the air and fall on a *wutong* tree.[4] Then a phoenix descended onto the same tree. The phoenix, the king of all birds, eats only bamboo seeds, perches only on *wutong* trees, and drinks only from sweet springs. Knowing that *wutong* provides good timber, Fuxi thought that a musical instrument made of wood containing cosmic essences would produce the most elegant music. And so he ordered that the tree be cut down.

"The thirty-three-foot-tall tree, in harmony with the thirty-three layers of heaven, was cut into three segments, representing heaven, earth, and people respectively.[5] Fuxi tapped the upper segment, but finding the sound too delicate and soft, he put it aside. He then took up the bottom segment, tapped it, and, finding the sound too coarse and thick, put it aside as well. When he tapped the middle segment, he discovered that the sound was neither too delicate and soft nor too coarse and thick. The timber was put into an ever-running stream to soak for seventy-two days, in harmony with the seventy-two divisions of the year.[6] When the time was up, it was taken out of the water, dried in the shade, and, on a chosen auspicious hour of an auspicious day, was made by Liu Ziqi, the master craftsman, into a musical instrument.

"Because it produced the kind of music heard only in the Jasper Pool, it was named the jasper zither.[7] It is three feet six and one-tenth inches long, in harmony with the three hundred and sixty-one degrees of the cosmic circumference; eight inches wide in front, in harmony with the eight solar terms of the year;[8] four inches wide at the back, in harmony with the four seasons; and two inches thick, in harmony with the two elements of heaven and earth. It has a Golden Boy head, a Jade Maiden waist,[9] a fairy's back, a dragon's pond, a phoenix's pool,[10] jade tuning pegs, and gold frets. The frets are twelve in number, in harmony with the twelve months. There is also another fret in the middle, which stands for the leap month. There were originally five strings, which, on a cosmic scale, stood for the five phases of metal, wood, water, fire, and earth, but on the zither itself they also represent the five musical notes.

"During the time of Yao and Shun, the five-string zither was played to accompany the singing of the poem 'The South Wind,' and peace reigned throughout the land.[11] Later, when King Wen of the Zhou dynasty was incarcerated in Youli

Prison, he added a string to his zither so as to enhance the dolefulness of the tone and express mourning for his son Boyikao. That added string came to be called King Wen's [lit. trans. of *wen* is "civilian"] string. Thereafter, King Wu of Zhou, while surrounded by singers and dancers between campaigns against King Zhou of the Shang dynasty, added another string to the zither to enhance the forcefulness of the tone. That string came to be called King Wu's [lit. trans. of *wu* is "military"] string. The zither with the original five strings plus the two added strings then became known as the Wen and Wu seven-stringed zither.

"As for the zither: there are six things to be avoided, seven situations in which it should not be played, and eight superior qualities that it alone possesses.

"What are the six things to be avoided? They are severe cold, scorching heat, strong winds, torrential rain, sudden peals of thunder, and heavy snow.

"What are the seven situations in which the zither should not be played? When there is a death, when other musical instruments are being played, when one is busy with miscellaneous things, when one has not washed oneself clean, when one is not properly attired, when no incense is being burned, and when no appreciative listener is present.

"What are its eight superior qualities? Well, in short, they are its delicacy, uniqueness, serenity, elegance, dolefulness, grandeur, sweetness, and lingering vibrations.

"When the zither is played to perfection, a roaring tiger that hears it will quiet down and a screaming monkey that hears it will stop its cries. This is what refined music can do."

Boya was impressed by the man's eloquence but thought he might have been merely reciting what he had learned by rote. But then another thought struck him, "Even if he memorized all this by rote, it's a very creditable effort. Let me test him further."

This time not addressing the man simply as "you" (*Now, watch how Boya gradually changes his tone.*), he asked again, "Since you, my friend, know so much about music, let me ask you another question. Once, when Confucius was playing the zither in a room, Yan Hui entered from outside. Puzzled when he detected a trace of a thought about killing in the rumbling notes, Yan Hui questioned Confucius about it. Confucius replied, 'A moment ago, when I was playing, I saw a cat chasing a rat. I hoped that the cat would get the rat and was afraid that it would miss its prey. And this thought about killing came through in the music.' This shows what a profound master of music the sage's student was. If I play the zither while thinking about something, would you, my friend, be able to guess what it is?"

The woodcutter replied, "I will 'try to surmise what is in another man's thoughts,' as is said in *The Book of Songs.* Please play something, sir, and I will try my best to guess. If I fail to guess right, please do not take offense."

Boya replaced the broken string and thought for a while before playing a few strains, thinking of high mountains. The woodcutter said in praise, "How beautiful! How majestic! You, sir, were thinking of high mountains."

Boya did not reply. After another few moments of concentration, he started playing again, this time thinking of flowing water. The woodcutter again broke into praises. "How beautiful! What a magnificent torrent! You, sir, were thinking of flowing water."

Astounded that the man had guessed right both times, Boya pushed the zither aside, stood up, and exchanged formal greetings as a host with his guest, Ziqi the woodcutter. (*According to* The Atlas, *there is a Boya Terrace in Haiyan County, Jiaxing Prefecture, Zhejiang. To one side of the terrace is the Listening to Zither Bridge. This could very well be the place where Zhong Ziqi listened to Boya play the zither. Generally speaking, stories are not accurate records of facts. Neither is this one. It proposes only to make the point that an appreciative friend is hard to come by.*)

"How discourteous of me!" Boya exclaimed over and over again. "Buried in the rock is a piece of fine jade. If people are judged only by their appearance, wouldn't many talents of the land go unrecognized? What, may I ask, is your honorable name?"

The woodcutter raised himself slightly from his seat and replied, "My surname is Zhong, my given name Hui, and my humble courtesy name Ziqi."

With hands respectfully folded before his chest, Boya said, "Please accept my greetings, Mr. Zhong Ziqi."

"May I ask your name, sir?" said Ziqi in his turn. "And where do you serve, sir?"

"My humble name is Yu Rui. I serve as an official in the court of the state of Jin. I am here in this country as an emissary."

"So, you are none other than His Honor Yu Boya himself."

Boya moved Ziqi to a seat reserved for a guest of honor, and he himself sat as the host at the head of the table. He then bade the page boy serve tea and, after tea, some wine.

"I may be a poor host, but let's have a chat over a cup of wine."

"What an honor for me," said Ziqi.

The page boy took away the zither, and the two men sat down for wine. Boya asked again, "Judging from your accent, I believe Mr. Zhong is a native of Chu, but where is your honorable residence?"

"Not far from here, in the Ma'an Mountains, there's a place called Village of Worthy Men. That's where my humble home is."

Boya nodded. "Truly a village where worthy men gather," he commented. "What is your occupation?"

"Nothing more than cutting firewood for a living."

Boya said with a smile, "Well, Ziqi my friend, this humble official shouldn't be speaking out of turn either, but with your ability, why not seek fame and glory and find a position in a royal court and a place in the annals of history? My humble opinion is that you should not waste your talents among woods and rivers in the company of woodcutters and herdsmen and end up rotting with the grass and the trees."

"To be honest," said Ziqi, "I have my aged parents to take care of, and I have

no siblings to help me do it. So I will continue to cut firewood for a living until my parents live out the rest of their days. I cannot bring myself to exchange even one day of taking care of my parents with the highest official title in the land."

"Such great filial piety is quite exceptional," said Boya.

They drank a while longer, toasting each other by turns.

Ziqi never lost his composure, not when he was being insulted earlier, nor when he was treated with much respect (*Well-made comment.*), which gained him even more respect and affection from Boya.

"May I ask your age?" said Boya.

"I have frittered away twenty-seven years."

"This humble official is older by ten years. If Ziqi is not disdainful, I would like us to pledge brotherhood, to do justice to our appreciation of each other and our friendship." (*Who else would be willing to do this?*)

"You are quite mistaken, sir. You are a famous official in your country, whereas I, Zhong Hui, am but a lowly woodcutter in a poor village. How would I dare aspire to claim connections with you and make demands on your kind attention?"

"I may have acquaintances all over the land, but how many among them understand my heart? In my busy, mundane life as an official, I consider it my greatest fortune to get to know such a worthy man as you. If you think I judge people by wealth and status, you are not doing me justice!" Thereupon he bade the page boy build up the flame in the incense burner, light some joss sticks of superior quality, and, in that very cabin, the two men performed the eight-bow ritual of pledged brotherhood, Boya as the older brother and Ziqi the younger. They pledged to address each other henceforth as brothers and never to betray each other in life or in death.

The ceremony over, more wine was heated and served. Ziqi insisted that Boya take the seat of honor, a courtesy Boya did not decline. Cups and chopsticks changed places, and Ziqi left the guest's seat. Addressing each other as brothers, they went on talking. (*From discourtesy to suspicion, to trust, to affection, and eventually to inseparable devotion, the friendship of the ancients is truly unmatchable.*) Indeed,

> *You never tire of a guest who shares your mind,*
> *Nor of one with an appreciative ear.*

In the course of their animated conversation, the moon paled, the stars dimmed, and the first faint glow of dawn lit the eastern sky. All the boatmen rose, readied the ropes and the sails, and prepared to set sail. Ziqi stood to bid Boya farewell.

Offering a cup of wine to Ziqi, Boya held the latter's hand and said with a sigh, "My good brother, I met you too late in my life, and now we have to part in such haste!"

When Ziqi heard this, tears fell from his eyes into the cup in spite of himself. He finished the wine in one gulp, filled another cup with wine, and offered it to Boya in return. Neither of them could bear the thought of parting.

"I'm not ready to part with you yet, my brother," said Boya. "I would like to invite you to leave with me and then stay with me for a few days. Would that be agreeable to you?"

"It's not that I don't want to go, my brother," said Ziqi, "but I have my parents to look after. [As Confucius says,] 'While your parents are alive, do not travel far.'"[12]

"But you can go home, tell them about it, and come to visit me in Jinyang.[13] By telling them about it, you will be 'making your whereabouts known to them.'"[14]

"I don't want to promise lightly because I do not want to go back on my words later. If I give you my promise, I will certainly fulfill it. (*Words of* [illegible].) Should my parents not approve my request, I would only be giving you false hopes while you wait for me thousands of li away, and I would be committing an even greater wrong."

"What a true gentleman my good brother is! All right, then, I'll come to see you next year."

"When will you be arriving next year, my good brother?" asked Ziqi. "Tell me, so that I know when to wait for you."

Counting on his fingers, Boya said, "Yesterday was the Mid-autumn Festival. With daybreak, it's now the sixteenth day of the eighth month. My good brother, I will be coming to visit you on the fifteenth or sixteenth day of the second month of next autumn. If I fail to arrive by the twenty-first day of that month or by the last month of autumn, I'll be breaking my promise, and I'll be no gentleman." He then turned to his page boy and said, "Tell the scribe to write down in the engagement book my good brother Zhong's address and the date of my visit next year."

Ziqi said, "In that case, I will stand by the river to wait for you on the fifteenth and sixteenth days of the second month of next autumn. I will do so without fail. Now, it's already light. I should be going."

"Not so fast, my good brother," said Boya.

He bade the page boy bring over two ingots of gold, and without wrapping them, he held them in his hands and said, "My good brother, this is a small gift from me, to be used toward supporting your parents. Please don't think that this is inadequate for a scholar's parents." Ziqi did not think it appropriate to decline the offer, so he accepted the gift.

After another bow of farewell, he left the cabin with tears in his eyes. He picked up his carrying pole, put his cape and hat in the load, attached the ax to his waistband, walked up the gangplank, holding onto the handrail, and went ashore. Boya saw him off at the bow of the boat, and they bade each other a tearful farewell.

We shall say no more of Ziqi's return home for the moment but will continue our story with Boya, who sounded the drum for the boats to set sail. However beautiful the scenery along the river, Boya had lost all interest in sightseeing. All his thoughts were with the one who understood his music. Several days later, he left the boat and continued the rest of the journey on land. Wherever he stopped, he was provided with horse carriages for transportation, for local officials knew him

to be a senior grand master in the state of Jin, not someone to be slighted. So he traveled in this manner all the way back to Jinyang, where he reported to the king about the mission, but of this, no more.

Time flew. Quite unnoticeably, autumn, winter, and spring went by, and summer rolled around. Ziqi was never absent from Boya's thoughts, even for one day. With the Mid-autumn Festival drawing near, he asked the king of Jin for leave to return to his hometown, and the king approved the request. Boya gathered his things together and went, as before, by river in a big detour. Once on board, he told the boatmen to tell him the name of every place where the boat was to moor. As coincidence would have it, exactly on the fifteenth night of the eighth month, the boatmen came to report, "We are near the Ma'an Mountains."

Vaguely recalling the place where the boat had moored last year when he met Ziqi, Boya told the boatmen to stop there, cast the anchor to the bottom of the river and drive in a wooden stake next to the shore so they could tie the boat to it. It was a clear night, and a moonbeam shone through the portiere of the cabin door. Boya had a page boy roll up the portiere and walked out to stand at the bow, where he gazed up at the handle of the Big Dipper. The vast expanse of the water, lit as bright as day, joined the sky at the horizon. His thoughts went back to this time last year when, with the rain just over and the moon shining brightly, he had met his true friend, and this happened to be a glorious night as well. His friend had promised to wait for him at the riverside, but why was there no trace of him? Could he have broken his promise?

After waiting for a while longer, he thought, "Ah, I know. There are so many boats coming and going, and I'm not in the one I had last year. How can I expect my brother to see me right away? Last year, my zither playing caught his attention. Tonight, let me play my zither again. When my brother hears it, he'll surely come to greet me." So thinking, he bade the page boy bring a table to the bow of the boat and put the zither on the table.

With incense burning and his seat in place, Boya opened the zither case, tuned the strings, and started playing, but the notes sounded mournful. He stopped. "Ah," he said to himself, "the notes are so mournful. This must mean that one of my brother's parents has passed away. Last year, he did say that his parents were quite advanced in years. Either his father or his mother must have died. Being the filial son that he is, he has his priorities and would rather break a promise to me than be remiss in his duties toward his parents. That's why he chose not to come. After daybreak tomorrow, I'll go up on the rocky shore and visit him at home."

He had the page boy take away the zither table and retired to his cabin for the night. But he was awake the whole night through, waiting for a daybreak that just would not come. As soon as the moon's shadow on the portiere vanished and the sun appeared at the top of the hills, Boya rose, straightened his clothes, told his page boy to follow him, and took out two hundred taels of gold. "My brother will need this for the funeral if he's in mourning," he said to himself.

In one jump, he landed on the rocks and began walking along a woodcutters' path, which took him to the mouth of a valley more than ten li away. He stopped and stood still.

"Why have you stopped, Master?" asked the page boy.

"There is one mountain to the south and another one to the north, and there is one road leading to the east and another one leading to the west. From the mouth of the valley, I can take either of these two thoroughfares, but I wonder which one leads to the Village of Worthy Men. Let's wait for someone who knows the area well and ask him for directions before continuing on our way."

Boya sat down on a rock to rest a little, and the page boy stood behind him. Soon, an old man came into view, walking slowly down the road on Boya's left-hand side. His beard flowing like threads of jade, his silvery hair tied up in a knot, he wore a bamboo hat and farmers' clothes. In his left hand he carried a rattan walking stick, and in his right hand, a bamboo basket. The old man advanced slowly in Boya's direction. Boya rose, adjusted his clothes, and stepped forward with a bow.

Unhurriedly, the old man put down the basket and returned the greeting. He raised his walking stick with both hands, saying, "What can I do for you, sir?"

"Could you tell me which of these two roads leads to the Village of Worthy Men?"

"Well, the two roads lead to two different villages, both called Village of Worthy Men. The one to the left is the Upper Village of Worthy Men, and the one to the right is the Lower Village of Worthy Men. They are separated by a thirty-li thoroughfare. You, sir, having just come out of the mouth of the valley, are at the very midpoint of the road, which stretches fifteen li to the east and fifteen li to the west. Now, which village do you have in mind?"

Boya was at a loss for words. He thought to himself, "My brother is an intelligent man, but how could he have been so careless? That night when we met, he should have told me clearly that there are two Villages of Worthy Men, one upper and one lower."

While Boya was in the midst of these reflections, the old man said, "You look thoughtful, sir. Whoever gave you directions must have spoken only about the Village of Worthy Men, without specifying whether it's the upper one or the lower one. That's why you, sir, are at a loss."

"Exactly," said Boya.

"There are about ten to twenty families in these two villages. They are mostly people who chose to live here in seclusion. I have been living in these mountains longer than others. As the saying goes, 'After thirty years of life in the same neighborhood, you form ties everywhere.' My neighbors are either my relatives or my friends. You, sir, must be visiting a friend. If you could tell me your friend's name, I'll tell you where he lives."

"I'm looking for the Zhong family."

At the mention of the Zhong family, tears fell from the old man's age-dimmed eyes. "Please visit any other household but the Zhongs."

"Why?" asked Boya, startled.

"Which member of the Zhong family do you want to see, sir?"

"Ziqi."

The old man burst into loud sobs. "Ziqi, Zhong Hui, was my son. On his way home, late on the fifteenth night of the eighth month last year, he met Mr. Yu Boya, senior grand master of the state of Jin. They chatted and found that they had much in common. Before he left, he was given two ingots of gold as a gift. My son then bought books and applied himself to his studies. I am such an old and stupid man that I did not stop him. By day, he chopped firewood and carried heavy loads; by night, he labored at his studies, exhausting himself both mentally and physically until he contracted consumption and died after a few months."

At these words, Boya felt as if his insides had split open. His tears flowing like a gushing spring, he let out a loud cry, fell to the ground by the cliff, and fainted.

Mr. Zhong Senior put his hands around Boya and, turning to the page boy, asked, "Who might this gentleman be?"

The page boy whispered into the old man's ear, "He is none other than Master Yu Boya."

"So, he is my son's good friend." So saying, Mr. Zhong Senior raised Boya up. Upon coming to, Boya sat on the ground, foaming at the mouth, beating his chest with both hands, and crying bitterly. "My good brother," he wailed, "last night when my boat cast anchor, I blamed you for having broken your promise. Little did I know that you had already become a ghost in the Nine Springs.[15] What a short life for a man of such talent!"

Mr. Zhong Senior wiped away his tears and said some comforting words.

When he finished weeping, Boya rose and saluted Mr. Zhong Senior anew, not as just any elderly man, but as an uncle, as if the two clans had been friends for generations.

"Uncle," said Boya, "is your son's coffin still at home or is it already buried in an open space?"

"It's a long story. My wife and I sat by his bedside before he died, and these were his last words: 'How long one gets to live is a matter dictated by divine will. While living, your son has failed to provide good support for you. After I die, please bury me by the river at the foot of the Ma'an Mountains because I wish to keep the promise I made to Yu Boya, grand master of Jin.' I have fulfilled my son's last wish. To the right of the path that you, sir, just traveled along is a mound of newly dug earth, and that is my son Zhong Hui's grave. Today being the one hundredth day after his death, here I am, carrying a string of paper coins to be burned at his grave. I certainly did not expect to run into you here, sir!"

"In that case," said Boya, "I'll go with you, Uncle, so that I can bow to the grave." So saying, he instructed the page boy: "Carry the bamboo basket for Grandpa."

Supporting himself on his walking stick, Mr. Zhong Senior led the way, followed by Boya, with the page boy bringing up the rear. Upon reentering the mouth

of the valley, Boya saw that there was indeed a mound of newly dug earth to the left of the path.

Boya adjusted his clothes and bowed deeply. "My good brother," said he, "in life you were an intelligent man. After death, you will be a deity responsive to prayers. Accept this bow from me, your unworthy brother, as my final farewell!" After bowing, he burst into loud wails again, wails that caught the attention of people all around this hilly region. Passersby as well as local residents, hearing that a court minister was here to mourn Zhong Ziqi, flocked to the grave and vied with one another for a better view. (*How vulgar, these rubberneckers!*)

Since he had not brought any sacrificial items, Boya found that he lacked the means to express his condolences. He told the page boy to take the zither from its case and put it on the stone altar. He then sat cross-legged in front of the grave and tearfully began to play. Hearing the clear, ringing notes of the zither, the onlookers clapped their hands and, laughing, went their separate ways.

"Uncle," said Boya, "I am overcome by grief when I play the zither to mourn my brother, your son. Why did these people laugh?"

Mr. Zhong Senior replied, "These are rustic people with no understanding of music. They laughed because they thought music is for entertainment."

"I see. Do you, Uncle, know what I've been playing?"

"I was quite studious when I was young, but now that I'm old and all my five senses are working only half as well as they used to, I have long since lost my ability to appreciate music."

"In that case, let me recite to you the short lyrics that I improvised to express my condolences for your son."

"I would be pleased to hear them," said the old man.

So Boya began to recite:

"I met you last spring at the riverside;[16]
I am here again, but where might my true friend be?
The sight of your grave gives me pangs of grief,
Pangs of grief that bring tears to my eyes.
Happily I came, sadly I go;
Gloomy clouds gather on the riverbanks.

"Ziqi! Ziqi! My good brother!
Our bond was worth a thousand pieces of gold;
We had more to talk about than the world could hold.
After this song of mine comes to an end,
I shall never play the zither again;
For you dies this three-foot jasper zither!"

Boya drew a small knife from inside his robe, cut the strings of the zither, raised it with both hands, and smashed it with all his might against the stone altar. The

zither broke into pieces, and the jade tuning pegs and gold frets scattered everywhere.

Aghast, Mr. Zhong Senior asked, "Why did you smash your zither?"

And this was Boya's reply:

> *"The zither smashed, the phoenix's tail grew cold.*[17]
> *Now that Ziqi's gone, for whom can I play?*
> *All call themselves friends and give you a smile,*
> *But to find a true friend is all too hard."*

Mr. Zhong Senior said, "I see. How sad! How sad!"

"Do you, Uncle, live in the Upper Village or the Lower Village?"

"My humble home is the eighth house down the road in the Upper Village. Why do you still want to know?"

"I am too grief-stricken to follow you home, Uncle, but I have here forty [*sic*] taels of gold, half of which I wish to give to you on behalf of your son, for your daily subsistence. The other half is for you to buy a few *mu* of land with which to earn enough income to pay for the annual sacrificial rites at your son's grave. After I return to my court, I will submit a memorial to ask for retirement. After I retire, I will come to the Upper Village of Worthy Men to escort you and my aunt to my humble home, where you will live for the rest of your lives. I am Ziqi, and Ziqi is me. (*Such is the friendship between the ancients. The rich, frivolous men of today should be shamed to death.*) Uncle, please don't reject me as an outsider." So saying, he had his page boy bring out the gold, and he himself handed it to Mr. Zhong Senior. Weeping bitterly, he prostrated himself on the ground. Mr. Zhong Senior returned the courtesy with a salute. Boya lingered for a while longer before they bade farewell to each other.

This story is titled "Yu Boya Smashes His Zither in Gratitude to an Appreciative Friend." A poet of later times had this to say in praise:

> *Snobs mingle with snobs,*
> *Nor do scholars value true friends.*
> *Boya's loyalty after Ziqi's death*
> *Lives on in the story of the smashed zither.*

2

Zhuang Zhou Drums on a Bowl and Attains the Great Dao

Wealth and rank are but short-lived dreams;
Fame and glory are but floating clouds.
Your kith and kin may not be forever,
For tender love may change to burning hate.

Do not put the golden cangue on your neck,[1]
Nor bind yourself with a jade padlock.
Free yourself from the desires of the mundane world;
Enjoy your days, and abide by your lot.

The above lyric poem to the tune of "The Moon over the West River" exhorts people to sever ties of misplaced love and set themselves free, although ties between father and son and those between brothers cannot be severed because they are branches on the same tree. Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism may have their differences, but none denies the virtues of filial piety and fraternal love. As for the children and grandchildren, well, you can't very well make sure that everything works out exactly as you wish for the generations that come after you. There is a saying that puts it well:

Your children will have their own share of fortune;
Don't serve them meekly like beasts of burden.

As for husband and wife, even though they are tied by a red thread around their waists and a red string around their ankles, they are, after all, separable, just as skin is from flesh.[2] As another saying puts it so well,

Husband and wife are birds in the same woods;
When day breaks at last, they fly their separate ways.

In our contemporary world, human relationships are at sixes and sevens. Although there isn't much aberration in the observance of relationships between father and son and between brothers, people do dote overly on their children, and

yet, the love for children is far exceeded by that between husband and wife. Goodness knows how many husbands, wallowing in the pleasures of the boudoir and listening to nothing but their wives' pillow talk, have been bewitched by women and done things in violation of filial piety and fraternal love. Such men are by no means men of wisdom.

I now propose to tell a story about Zhuang Zhou drumming on a bowl.[3] I do so not with the intention of provoking marital strife but simply to exhort people to know what is good from what is stupid and what is true from what is false and to tone down the passion that consumes them most. Gradually, much to their own advantage, their six senses will be purified, and Daoist thoughts will arise in their minds.[4] A poet of olden times, watching a farmer transplanting rice seedlings, intoned a quatrain that is full of insight:

Green seedlings in hand, you plant them one by one;
Head bent down, you see the sky in the water.
The six senses cleansed, you acquire the Dao;[5]
To back up is in fact to move ahead.[6]

As the story goes, toward the end of the Zhou dynasty, there lived a very wise man named Zhuang Zhou, courtesy name Zixiu, who was a native of Meng County in the state of Song.[7] While serving as an official in Qiyuan,[8] he studied under a great sage, the founder of Daoism, named Li Er, courtesy name Boyang. Born with white hair on his head, the sage was called Laozi [The Old Master] by all and sundry.

In one of his frequent daytime naps, Zhuang Zhou dreamed that he was a butterfly merrily flapping its wings in a garden among flowers and grass. Upon waking up, he still felt that his arms were fluttering like wings. He found it all very strange, and from that time on, the dream often came back to him. One day, during a recess in a lecture by Laozi on *The Book of Changes,* he told his teacher about his dreams. Being the great sage that he was, Laozi knew all about Zhuang Zhou's previous, current, and future lives and revealed to Zhuang that in his previous life, when the primeval chaos was first separated into heaven and earth, he had been a white butterfly. (*How absurd! What a far-fetched explanation!*) [As Laozi recounted,] heaven begot water and then wood. When wood flourished and flowers thrived, the white butterfly gathered the essences of all the hundred flowers and, nourished by the vital elements of the sun, the moon, and the climate, attained eternal life, with its wings as big as wheels. Later, while playing at the Jasper Pool,[9] it stole some pistils from the immortal peach blossoms, for which it was pecked to death by the green phoenix, guardian of flowers serving the Queen Mother of the Immortals. But the dead butterfly's spirit did not dissolve. It was reincarnated into the body of Zhuang Zhou of the mortal world. It was with such extraordinary natural endowments, in addition to a firm determination to follow the Dao, that he was now studying, as a disciple of Laozi, the teachings of quiescence and nonaction.

Enlightened by Laozi's account of his previous life, Zhuang felt as if he had just

woken up from a dream, and his arms began to feel airborne, like the fluttering wings of a butterfly. Thereafter, he looked upon the vicissitudes of life in this world as nothing more than floating clouds and flowing water and freed himself from the trammels of care and worry.

Knowing that Zhuang Zhou had attained enlightenment, Laozi imparted to him all the secrets contained in the five-thousand-character *Daodejing.*[10] Zhuang Zhou assiduously intoned and studied the text, and he devoted himself to the cultivation of the Dao until he acquired the magic of self-replication, body concealment, and metamorphosis. (*So, the magic of self-replication, body concealment, and metamorphosis is contained in the* Daodejing. *Too bad it's quite beyond the ken of average people.*)

Zhuang Zhou then resigned from his position as an official in Qiyuan, took leave of Laozi, and began a wandering life in quest of the Dao.

Though a disciple of the teachings of quiescence and purification of the senses, he had not cut himself off from the ties of marriage. In fact, he had been married to three wives, one after another. The first one had died from illness. As for the second, he had divorced her on grounds of misdemeanor. Our story is about the third wife, who was from the Tian clan that ruled the state of Qi.

During Zhuang Zhou's wanderings in the state of Qi, the patriarch of the Tian clan was impressed by Zhuang's character and married his daughter to Zhuang. Now this Tian-shi was more beautiful than the two previous wives—her skin as fair as ice and snow, and her movements as graceful as those of a fairy maiden. Though not a man who succumbed easily to feminine charm, Zhuang Zhou was very fond of her and was as happy in this union as a fish in water.

King Wei of Chu, upon hearing about Zhuang's reputation as a man of worth, sent a messenger to him with an offer of the position of chief of protocol. The messenger also brought gifts of two thousand taels of gold, a thousand bolts of colorful silk, and a carriage drawn by four horses. With a sigh, Zhuang Zhou said, "An ox raised for sacrificial purposes, finding itself covered with brocade and fed fine fodder, gloats over its glory when it sees a farm ox hard at work, plowing the fields. But by the time it is led into the temple to face the ax, how it wishes, in vain, to be a farm ox!" With that, he rejected the offer and went back with his wife to the state of Song, to live the life of a recluse in the Nanhua Mountains in Caozhou.[11]

One day, on a tour at the foot of a mountain, Zhuang Zhou saw one deserted grave after another. He said with a sigh, "As the saying goes, 'The old and the young become indistinguishable. The wise and the foolish go the same way.' Can a body be resurrected once it is laid in the grave?" After heaving sigh upon sigh, he resumed his steps. Suddenly, he saw a new grave, with the earth at the top still wet. A young woman in mourning white was sitting by the grave, fanning it with a white silk fan in her hand. (*How very strange!*)

Zhuang Zhou asked in amazement, "Who is the person buried in the grave, madam? Why are you fanning the earth? You must have a reason for doing so."

The woman did not stand up and kept fanning away at the grave, giving, in that sweet little voice of hers, a reply that defied all reason. Truly, it was enough to

Twist a thousand mouths from too much laughing,
And put to greater shame the one saying it.

This is what the woman said: "Buried in the grave are my dead husband's bones. He was very much in love with me and couldn't bear the thought of parting with me upon death. Before dying, he told me that should I want to remarry, I must wait until the funeral was over and the earth on the grave was dry. Because it takes time for the earth on a newly dug grave to dry, I'm fanning it to make it dry faster."

Smiling, Zhuang Zhou thought to himself, "What an impatient woman! And she had the nerve to say that they had been in love! What would she be up to if they had never been in love?" So thinking, he said, "Madam, nothing can be easier than drying some newly dug earth. Your arms are too soft and delicate. You just don't have enough strength for this fanning job. Please let my unworthy self lend you my arm." (*Naughty Mr. Zhuang!*)

It was not until this moment that the woman stood up. With a deep curtsy, she said, "Many thanks to you, sir!" With both hands, she passed the white silk fan to Zhuang Zhou, who then began to apply his Daoist magic. He fanned the top of the grave a few times in quick succession. Immediately, all the moisture evaporated and the earth dried up.

Radiant with smiles, the woman said, "Thank you, sir, for all this trouble." With her dainty hand, she took a silver hairpin from her temple and gave it along with the silk fan to Mr. Zhuang as tokens of her gratitude. Zhuang Zhou declined the hairpin but accepted the fan, and, merrily, the woman took herself off.

Zhuang Zhou returned home, feeling quite upset. Sitting in his room and looking at the silk fan, he intoned the following quatrain:

"If not so fated, lovers will never meet,
But once they do, when will their cursed love end?
Had you known that no love lasts beyond the grave,
You would have cut off all love before your death."

Hearing Zhuang Zhou's laments, Tian-shi walked up to him from behind to ask what it was all about. As he was a cultured gentleman, Mr. Zhuang was respectfully addressed by his wife as "sir." Tian-shi said, "What are you lamenting, sir? Where did you get this fan?"

Zhuang Zhou told her about the woman fanning the grave so that the earth would dry quickly and she could remarry. "She gave me this fan as a gift," he concluded, "to thank me for helping her fan the grave."

Tian-shi burst into righteous indignation. "What a bad woman!" she cried over and over again, her face raised toward the sky. Then she addressed Zhuang Zhou, saying, "Such a heartless woman! The world has hardly ever seen the likes of her!"

At these words, Zhuang Zhou intoned another poem:

> *"Before you die, they all profess wifely love;*
> *After you're gone, they all rush to fan the graves.* (Sheer exaggeration!)
> *You may draw dragons and tigers—*
> *But how do you draw their bones?*
> *You may know people's faces—*
> *But how do you know their hearts?"*

Tian-shi exploded with rage. As an old saying put it, "Resentment makes you renounce ties of kinship; rage makes you forget all rules of decorum." Carried away with anger, she cast all polite manners to the winds and spit into her husband's face, saying, "There are good people, and there are foolish people. How can you so lightly dismiss all women as being alike? Aren't you being unfair to good women just because of some bad ones? That was quite an offensive remark, you know."

"Don't talk so big," countered Zhuangzi. "If I, Zhuang Zhou, should unfortunately die, am I to understand that you, in your blooming youth, will be able to get through even three to five years of widowhood?"

Tian-shi shot back, "As the saying goes, 'A loyal minister serves only one sovereign; a chaste woman serves only one husband.' Have you ever seen a woman from a good family accept two offers of marriage and sleep in the beds of two households? If the misfortune you spoke of does befall me, I will never do anything so shameful, never for the rest of my life, let alone a mere three to five years! Even in my dreams I am something of a woman of moral rectitude!" (*There has to be something suspicious about those with clever tongues.*)

"You never can tell! You never can tell!" said Zhuang.

Tian-shi countered with this tirade: "Women of moral rectitude are superior to men. Now *you* are a heartless one. You took in another wife when your first wife died and then divorced the second one and took in a third. You assume that everyone else would stoop to your level. Now *I,* as a woman, am firmly committed to *the* one in my life, just as one saddle serves only one horse. How would I ever allow myself to be a subject of gossip and let future generations hold me up to ridicule? You certainly are not dying; what right do you have to accuse me so unjustly?" (*It was this last remark that gave Zhuangzi the idea.*) So saying, she snatched the silk fan away from him and tore it to pieces.

"All this anger is quite uncalled for," said Zhuang. "I only hope you'll be able to live up to your words." With that, the argument came to an end.

A few days later, Zhuang Zhou was suddenly taken ill, and he got worse day by day. To Tian-shi, who sat sobbing by his bed, he said, "Being as ill as I am, I'll soon be parted from you forever. Too bad the silk fan was torn to pieces the other day. If it were still here, wouldn't it come in handy when you want to fan the grave?"

"Don't be so suspicious of me, sir," said Tian-shi. "I'm an educated woman with an understanding of decorum. I swear that I have no other wish than to serve only

one man until I die. If you don't believe me, I'm more than willing to die right here before your eyes, so that you'll know for sure that I mean what I say."

"Yes, now that I do see you as a woman of moral rectitude, I can rest easy in death." With these words, he stopped breathing.

Stroking the corpse, Tian-shi burst into loud wails. As was the usual practice in such situations, she went around asking for the neighbors' help in preparing the burial clothes, the coffin, and the funeral rites. Clad in mourning white from head to toe, she was truly distraught with grief and cried bitterly day and night. Memories of Zhuang's love so overwhelmed her that she lost all desire for food and sleep.

Some of the farmers in the neighborhood, knowing that this Mr. Zhuang was a recluse living in the mountains in retirement from the world of fame, came to express their condolences, but funeral ceremonies in those parts were by no means the grand events they were in the cities.

On the seventh day, there suddenly arrived a young scholar with a complexion as fair as if by powder and lips as red as if with rouge. A more handsome and dashing young man could hardly be found. Wearing a purple robe, a black hat, an embroidered waistband, and red boots, and followed by an old servant, he claimed to be a member of the royal house of Chu, here because Mr. Zhuang had, some years before, promised to take him on as a disciple. Upon learning that Mr. Zhuang had died, he said, "What a loss!" With that, he immediately took off his purple robe, had the servant take out a white robe from their luggage, and put it on. "Master Zhuang," he said, with four bows to the coffin, "though this disciple of yours is not predestined to benefit from your teachings face-to-face, I wish to keep vigil for you for a hundred days to fulfill our bond as teacher and student."

After another four tearful bows, he rose and asked to see Tian-shi, who declined this request at first.

"According to tradition," said the young man, "women do not avoid the presence of their husbands' close friends, let alone their husbands' students, and I was Mr. Zhuang's student."

Resignedly, Tian-shi went out of the hall of mourning, greeted the young man of Chu, and exchanged some amenities with him. The good looks of the young man stirred tender feelings in her. Too bad, she thought, that she had no excuse to get to know him better.

The young man said, "Though my teacher is gone, I admire him so much that I will never forget him. I'd like to stay in your house for a hundred days, partly to keep vigil over my deceased teacher's coffin and partly for an opportunity to read any writings he might have left behind, so that I may benefit from his teachings."

"Being a good friend of the family," said Tian-shi, "you are welcome to stay here for as long as you wish."

Right away, a meal was set out in the young man's honor. After the meal, Tian-shi offered him *The Book of Nanhua* by Zhuangzi and the five-thousand-character *Daodejing* by Laozi. The young man thanked her heartily.

The center of the mourning hall was occupied by the memorial tablet for the deceased, so the young man took up quarters in the left section of the hall. Every day, Tian-shi went to that section of the hall, ostensibly to mourn the deceased, but actually to strike up some conversation with the young man. Gradually, a kind of familiarity began to develop between them, with exchanges of significant glances in a passion that was quite beyond control. If the young man was in love, Tian-shi was doubly so. Luckily, they were living in secluded mountains where no tongue would wag even if some impropriety were committed. But regrettably for her, the death was still too recent, and a marriage proposal could hardly be initiated by a woman.

A few more days went by. It was now about half a month after Zhuangzi's death. The woman found her passion too fiery to control. Surreptitiously, she summoned the visitor's old servant into her room, where she served him good wine, said nice things to him, and then asked, calmly, "Is your master betrothed?"

"Not yet."

"What kind of woman does your master have in mind for a wife?"

"My master said," replied the old servant, a little under the influence of the wine, "that he would be most happy with someone as pretty as you are."

"Did he really say that? You're not lying?"

"How could an old man like me lie?"

"In that case, I'd like to ask you to be the matchmaker. If your master doesn't object, I will gladly serve him as a wife."

"My master has said to me that this would be a good marriage, but he was your deceased husband's student, so he's afraid people might talk."

"My deceased husband only promised that he would teach your master. That doesn't make your master his student. Also, we have few neighbors in these deserted mountains. Who will be talking? Grandpa, you must tactfully pull off this job. You'll surely be invited to the wedding feast."

The old servant gave his promise. He was on the point of leaving when the woman called him back and said, "If he agrees, come back to my room, regardless of the hour, and let me know. I will be waiting here for a reply."

After the old servant left, the woman waited expectantly. Dozens of times she peeped into the hall of mourning. How she wished she could tie a thin string around the dashing young man's shapely feet and pull him into her room for a tight embrace! (*What a vivid description of the woman's burning desires!*)

When dusk set in, the woman's impatience got the better of her. In the darkness, she walked into the hall of mourning and listened for movements in the left section of the hall. Suddenly, she heard a noise from the table with the memorial tablet. She gave a start, thinking that it must have been the dead soul manifesting its presence. She hastened into the inner room to get a candle. By the candlelight, she saw that it was the old servant lying stiff on the table in a drunken stupor. Not daring to scold him or wake him up, she had no choice but to return to her own room, where she passed a wakeful night, counting the hours that went by.

The following day, she saw the old servant pottering about without coming to her with a reply. Itching with suspense, she summoned the old man into her room again and asked him about the matter.

"Can't be done!" said the servant.

"Why not? Didn't you relay to him what I said last night?"

"I did, but my master does have a point. He said, 'The problem is not with her looks, of course. And, since I was never officially taken on as a student, my scruples in this connection can also be disregarded. But there are three concerns that prevent me from accepting her offer.'"

"What three concerns?"

"My master said, 'With that unlucky thing—the coffin—placed right in the middle of the hall, how can I bring myself to hold a wedding ceremony with her? And it's quite an unseemly sight, too. Second, Master Zhuang and she were a loving couple. Moreover, he was a famous man of virtue and wisdom. My learning is not anywhere near his level. I'm afraid that she would look down on me. Third, my luggage has not arrived yet. I'm here quite empty-handed and unable to pay for all the expenses of betrothal gifts, the wedding feast, and so forth. These are the three reasons why I'm saying no.'"

"But there's no need to worry about these three things," the woman rejoined. "The coffin isn't rooted to the ground, is it? At the back of the house, there's a vacant room in bad condition. I'll just have a few farmhands move the coffin there. So the first concern is taken care of.

"About the second concern, how was my deceased husband ever a famous man of virtue and wisdom? He had failed to run an orderly household; that's why he divorced his wife and came to be called a heartless man. King Wei of Chu heard of his undeserved reputation and, out of admiration, sent him lavish gifts and invited him to be prime minister, but he himself knew all too well that he wasn't qualified for the job, and that's why he took refuge in this place. ([Illegible] . . . *a hero. She belongs to the kind of people with a penchant for vicious slander. How pathetic!*) Some time ago, when he was walking alone at the foot of the hill, he saw a widow fanning her deceased husband's grave so that she could remarry after the earth dried up. Taking liberties with that woman, my husband grabbed her silk fan, fanned the grave for her, and then brought the fan back home. I tore it to pieces. With such a man who exasperated me like this just a few days before he died, what love was there to speak of? Your young master, as studious as he is, will surely go far. Moreover, as he is from a royal background and I am from the distinguished Tian family, we will be well matched in status. The very fact that he's now in this place means that this is a match made in heaven.

"As for the third concern, about expenses for betrothal gifts and the wedding feast, I will take care of everything. I have no need for betrothal gifts, and I can easily afford the feast. On top of that, I'll also give your master twenty taels of silver out of my own private savings for him to make new clothes. Now go again and

tell him what I said. Today is a lucky day for a wedding. If he says yes, the wedding can be held this very evening."

The old servant took the twenty taels of silver and went to relay the message to his master, who resignedly gave his consent. When the old servant told the woman about this, she went wild with joy. With alacrity, she removed her white mourning garments, applied her makeup, put on brightly colored clothes, and told the old servant to engage farmhands in the neighborhood to carry the coffin containing Zhuang Zhou's body into the dilapidated room at the back of the house. The hall was then swept clean in preparation for the wedding feast. There is a poem that bears witness:

The pretty widow—how charming she looks!
The handsome young man—what a dashing flirt!
One saddle for one horse—whose words were they?
Her thoughts tonight—be wedded anew!

That night, the woman prepared the bridal chamber, and the hall of mourning was ablaze with lights. The couple—he wearing a hat and a robe, she in a brocade blouse and an embroidered skirt—stood by the nuptial candles, looking as resplendent as if made of jade and gilded with gold. After they made their ceremonial bows, they went lovingly hand in hand into the bridal chamber, where they drank the nuptial wine. They were heading for the bed, ready to undress for the night, when the bridegroom, his brows knit tightly in a frown, stopped short in his tracks and collapsed to the floor. His hands clutching at his chest, he complained of a sharp chest pain.

In her love for the young man, Tian-shi cast aside all the scruples of a newlywed. She held him in her arms, rubbed his chest, and asked him how he was feeling, but in his extreme pain, speech was beyond him. Foaming at the mouth, he was on the verge of death. The old servant cowered in fear.

"Have there been attacks like this before?" asked Tian-shi.

The old servant replied on his master's behalf, "Yes, frequently, once every year or two. There's no medicine for it, but there is one cure that works in no time."

"What is it?" Tian-shi asked eagerly.

"The physician of the royal family gave him a prescription that works wonders. As soon as he swallows the brains from a living human being with some warm wine, the pain goes away. (*Naughty! Naughty!*) Every time he had an attack like this, his father, the old prince, would ask for the king's approval to have a convict awaiting execution trussed up and killed in order to get his brains. But where to get a human being's brains in these mountains? Oh, he's going to die this time, for sure!"

"A living person's brains are certainly out of the question," said Tian-shi, "but will a dead man's brains do?" (*There she goes!*)

The old servant replied, "According to the physician of the royal family, within

forty-nine days of death, the brains have not yet dried up and can be used for that purpose."

"My husband has been dead for only about twenty days. Why not open the coffin and take his brains?"

"But you, madam, may not be willing to do this," said the old servant.

"Your master and I are now husband and wife. A wife has the duty to serve her husband with every fiber of her being. Since I don't begrudge him anything I have, why should I deny him what a heap of dead bones can offer?"

So saying, she ordered the old servant to attend to the young man while she herself found a firewood ax. With the ax in her right hand and a lamp in her left, she went to the dilapidated room at the back of the house. She put the lamp above the coffin lid and, fixing her eyes on the head of the coffin, raised the ax with both hands and brought it down with all the force she could muster. How is it that a coffin yielded to a woman of little strength? Let me explain. Being a man who rose above worldly concerns, Zhuang Zhou had opted for a simple funeral with a coffin made of *tong*-wood planks only three inches thick. With one hack of the ax, there went one piece of wood. Another hack, and the lid of the coffin split open. Lo and behold! With a sigh, Mr. Zhuang pushed open what remained of the lid and sat up.

However ruthless of heart, Tian-shi was, after all, but a woman. She was so frightened that her legs gave way under her, her heart pounded, and the ax fell to the floor without her knowing it.

"Wife," said Zhuangzi, "help me get out."

The woman saw nothing for it but to help Zhuang out of the coffin. Holding the lamp, Zhuangzi led the way, and the woman followed him into the hall. Thinking that the young man of Chu was in the hall with his servant, she was breathless with fear. For each step forward, she took two steps back. Upon arriving in the hall, she saw that the decorations were still there, as splendid as before, but the master and servant were nowhere in sight. Though apprehensive, the woman felt relieved nonetheless and, trying to lie her way out of it, said to Zhuang, "Since you died, I've been grieving day and night. I heard a noise in the coffin just a moment ago, and, thinking of the many stories about resurrections of the dead in ancient times, I began to hope that you would also come back to life. That's why I hacked at the coffin with an ax. Thanks to heaven and earth, you did indeed come back to life! What a lucky woman I am!"

"I thank you, wife, for your kindness. I have one question, though. The mourning period isn't over. Why are you in a brocade blouse and an embroidered skirt?"

The woman again prevaricated, saying, "To open the coffin is a happy event. I didn't dare let my mourning clothes clash with the good luck. That's why I put on brocade and silk, for good luck."

"All right! All right! But why is the coffin not in the main hall but discarded in that miserable room? Don't tell me that's also for good luck!"

The woman was struck speechless.

At the sight of the fine spread on the feast table, Zhuang Zhou asked no questions but ordered that wine be heated and brought to him. Letting himself go, he filled his horn-shaped vessel to the brim and drank one vessel after another.

Lacking good sense, the woman still hoped to regain her husband's affection and resume their conjugal life. She positioned herself near the wine flask and, acting the part of a spoiled coquette and mouthing tender and sweet words, tried to coax Zhuang into going to bed with her.

In a state of drunkenness, Zhuang Zhou asked for paper and a brush-pen and wrote the following quatrain:

We have settled the debts of our cursed love;
Now you're eager to love, but I am not.
To be your husband again is perhaps
To bring your ax down on top of my head!

When the woman read these lines, shame was written all over her face. Speech failed her. Zhuang wrote another quatrain:

What love is there between husband and wife?
Drawn to another man, she forgets her own.
The coffin was barely closed when down came the ax;
She beats the woman who fanned the grave dry.

Zhuang said again, "Let me show you two men." The woman turned to look in the direction of Zhuang's pointing finger, and whom should she see but the young man of Chu and his old servant, walking into the room at a leisurely pace. She gave a start. Turning around, she found Zhuang Zhou gone. Turning back again, she realized that the young man and his servant were gone, too. In fact, there was no young man of Chu or his old servant. It was Zhuang Zhou who had assumed their forms, using his magic of self-replication and body concealment.

As if in a trance, the woman felt a burning shame. She took off her embroidered waistband and hanged herself from a rafter. Alas! She gave up the ghost, and this time, the death was for real.

Seeing that the woman was dead and gone, Zhuangzi untied the knot, took her down, and put her body in the broken coffin. With an earthen bowl in hand to serve as a musical instrument, he leaned against the coffin and began to sing, drumming away on the bowl to keep time. And this is what he sang:

"Nature unwittingly gave life to her and me,
I not her husband, she not my wife.
By chance we met and lived under one roof;
When the hour comes, we unite, we part.
The unkind shift their love when their spouses die;
The truth laid bare, death is the only choice.

In life, she got to pick and choose;
In death, she returned to the void.
She mourned me by wielding the mighty ax;
I mourn her with this little song of mine.
The sound of the ax brought me back to life.
Do the notes of this song fall on her ears?
Well! Let me smash the bowl and stop beating time.
Who is she? And who am I?"

After the song, he intoned a quatrain:

"When you died, I buried your remains;
When I died, you married someone else.
If last time I had really died,
What a farce it all would have been!"

With a hearty laugh, he smashed the bowl and lit a fire that spread from the main hall to the other rooms and burned the whole house down. The coffin was also reduced to ashes. Only the *Daodejing* and *The Book of Nanhua* were indestructible. They were picked up by some local resident in the mountains and were passed down to this day. Zhuangzi spent his time wandering over the length and breadth of the land and never married again. By some accounts, he followed Laozi after meeting him at the Hangu Pass, whereupon he acquired the Dao, and became an immortal.[12] There is a poem that says,

Wu Qi the wife-killer should have known better;[13]
Xun Can's deep grief is just as laughable.[14]
Follow the example of bowl-beating Zhuang.
How free from care! How free from restraints!

3

Three Times Wang Anshi Tries to Baffle Academician Su

The sea turtle scorns the frog in the well;
The roc wings its way around the heavens.
For every smart one, there's someone smarter;
Never be smug and sing your own praises.

The four lines above exhort people to be modest and respectful of others and to guard against conceit. The ancients put it well: "Conceit spells loss; modesty brings benefit." There is also a proverb about four things that one should never do to an extreme. What are they?

Power should not be exercised to the utmost;
Fortune should not be enjoyed to the utmost;
Advantage should not be taken to the utmost;
Clever brains should not be racked to the utmost.

Consider how the powerful and influential people of today, instead of performing good deeds, often go wherever their whims and impulses lead them and bring affliction to other people. Seeing that others resignedly keep them at a distance out of fear, much as one would avoid going near poisonous snakes and ferocious beasts, they brim over with smugness, believing themselves to be the winners. Little do they know that there is a time when even the most furious tidal waves in the eighth month die down. Taking advantage of the favorable wind, they ride the surging waves in full sail over dangerous shoals. What a thrill it is! But they never give a thought to the fact that it is easier to go than to return.

In olden times, King Jie of the Xia dynasty and King Zhou of the Shang dynasty, Sons of Heaven though they were, ended up in disgrace.[1] One was banished to Nanchao [in present-day Chao County, Anhui], and the other was executed and his head was paraded on a Taibai banner. What crimes did Jie and Zhou commit? For the most part, they took advantage of their exalted positions to tyrannize the lowly and used their might to bully the weak. In short, they abused power. Had Jie and Zhou been commoners, would they have done so many evil deeds? (*Sound*

argument.) That is why the proverb says that power should not be exercised to the utmost.

How do you explain the line "Fortune should not be enjoyed to the utmost?" Well, as is often said, "Take good care of your clothes, and you shall have clothes aplenty. Waste not your food, and you shall have food galore." Another proverb says, "Having lived out your span of life, you die; having used up your means, you perish." In the Jin dynasty, there was a certain Grand Commandant Shi Chong, who, in a competition with Wang Kai, an imperial kinsman, to show off their wealth, had pots washed with wine, generated heat with candles instead of firewood, and erected a brocade wall that stretched for fifty li. Even the lavatories were embellished with satin and silk gauze curtains that gave off a fragrance that assailed the nostrils. The servants and page boys were dressed in clothes made of asbestos fabric so expensive that one article of clothing cost a thousand pieces of gold. Concubines were bought at about ten bushels of pearls each. Later, Shi Chong died at the hands of King Lun of Zhao, his head severed from his body. This was divine retribution for his excessive enjoyment of his good fortune.[2]

What about the line "Advantage should not be taken to the utmost?" Well, if a merchant made a calculation error in his own favor, he may very well smile with delight, but he may not know that the error can cause a lowly peddler and his family to go hungry. And how much good does it do to gain such petty advantages anyway? A poet of olden times had this to say about taking advantage of others:

I will use your quilts as if they were mine;
At my disposal your blankets will also be.
When you have money, I'll help you use it;
If I run out of money, I will use yours.
On my way uphill, your hands support my feet;
On my way downhill, I lean on your shoulders.
If I have a son, he marries your daughter;
If you have a daughter, she sleeps by my side.
If you keep these words, I'll die after you;
If I break my words, you'll die before me.

If this advice is put into practice, everyone will want to follow suit. What fool would obligingly be taken advantage of? But, unbeknownst to you, your momentary gain will compromise your fortune and shorten your span of life. Therefore, Buddhism teaches that to suffer even the least bit of loss is to be blessed with boundless fortune in return. There is a poem in testimony:

You rejoice over every petty gain;
You grieve when things go against your plan.
If no gains and no losses,
Then no joys and no sorrows.

Storyteller, you've explained the first three lines well enough, but as for the last line, a clever head is really more than anything one could wish for. Why can't clever brains be racked to the utmost?

Well, there are, in this world, more things than you can ever see, more books than you can ever read, and more truths than you can ever understand. It is better to appear less smart than you are than the other way around. Let me now tell a story of a man who was the smartest man there ever has been. For all his intelligence, however, he had his few moments of foolishness and left us with this jewel of a story—a story that will serve as a lesson for all young men who are inclined to boast about their talent. Who was this most intelligent man?

He was a master of poetry and prose,
Full of humor and good at solving riddles.
If not another Confucius reborn,
He was surely a Yan Hui come back to life.[3]

As the story goes, during the reign of Emperor Shenzong [r. 1068–85] of the Song dynasty, there was a famous scholar by the name of Su Shi [1037–1101], courtesy name Zizhan, who also called himself Dongpo [Eastern Slope]. A native of Meishan in Meizhou, Sichuan, he made a name for himself by passing the imperial examinations on his first try and attained the rank of Academician in the Hanlin Academy. A highly gifted man, he was able to memorize a passage verbatim after a single reading and to speak as elegantly as a master of literature writes on paper. With the romantic inclinations of Li Bai and a mind sharper than that of Cao Zhi, he worked under Prime Minister Wang Anshi, who later came to be enfeoffed as the duke of Jing.[4] Wang Anshi had a high regard for Su's talent, but Su Dongpo, made presumptuous by his own cleverness, heaped scornful remarks on the prime minister.

Prime Minister Wang had written a book titled *Etymology,* in which he gave one definition to each character. About the character *po* [slope], as in the name Su Dongpo, the definition given was that *po,* consisting of the left radical "earth" and the right radical "skin," was "the skin of earth." Dongpo commented with a grin, "By the prime minister's logic, the character *hua* [slippery], consisting of the radical 'water' and the radical 'bone,' means nothing less than 'the bone of water'!"

One day, Wang Anshi further explained that the character *ni* [salamander], composed of the radicals "fish" and "son," meant "small fish," that the character *si,* composed of "horse" and "four," meant a team of four horses, and that the character *can* [silkworm] was made up of the upper radical "sky" and the lower radical "insect." He concluded that the ancients had created new characters by grouping meaningful radicals together.

At this point, Dongpo folded his hands respectfully in front of his chest and said, "There is indeed a reason why the character *jiu* [turtledove] consists of the radicals 'nine' and 'bird.'"

The prime minister trustingly asked to be enlightened.

Dongpo replied, all affability, "*The Book of Songs* says, 'On the mulberry perch chirping turtledoves,[5] / Seven of which are little fledglings.' So the seven little ones plus the mom and the dad do make nine!" (*Indeed as flippant as he was said to be!*)

Wang Anshi fell silent. Displeased by Su Shi's flippancy, Wang demoted him to the post of prefect of Huzhou. Truly,

A big mouth is the source of all trouble;
A glib tongue is to blame for all sorrows.

When his three-year term of office came to an end, Dongpo went back to the capital and found lodging in the Great State Councillor Monastery. He recalled how he had offended the prime minister years before and knew that he had only himself to blame. As the saying goes, "Before you go to see the emperor, you should first visit the prime minister." Carrying his résumé and visiting card, which he had told his attendants to prepare for him, he mounted his horse and headed for Prime Minister Wang's residence.

About a stone's throw from the Wang mansion, Dongpo dismounted and walked up to the gate. Seeing many officials standing at the gate, he raised a hand and asked, "Gentlemen, may I ask if the prime minister is in?"

The custodian stepped out and replied, "My master is taking a nap. Please sit in the custodian's room for a while." So saying, he had a servant put a recliner in the room. Dongpo sat down, leaving the door ajar.

A few moments later, a young man of about twenty years of age in a servant's big horsehair hat and a casual blue silk robe emerged from the house and strutted importantly down the steps. All the officials bowed and made way for him. After the young man had gone off in a westerly direction, Dongpo sent his servant to ask who that man was. The servant came back with the answer that the young man, named Xu, was an attendant in the prime minister's study.

Dongpo did recall, from three years before, a certain Xu Lun employed in the study, a boy who had gained much favor with the prime minister. Twenty years old now, wearing a hat befitting his age, he still looked the same as before. Dongpo said to his servant, "Well, since that's Mr. Xu, go after him quickly and ask him to come back here."

The servant ran as fast as his legs could carry him. When he caught up with the young man, he dared not call out from behind but took a few more hurried steps forward, shot past the young man, and then stopped in his tracks right there on the street, his hands respectfully at his sides. "Sir," he addressed the young man, "I am an attendant of Master Su of Huzhou Prefecture. Master Su is now in the custodian's room and wishes to have a word with you."

"Is it Master Su with a beard?" asked Xu Lun.

"None other."

Being the romantic scholar that he was, Dongpo was all geniality to everyone

he met and was on quite good terms with Xu Lun, having sometimes given the young man gifts of fans with his handwriting on them. So at the name of Academician Su, Xu Lun smiled and turned back.

The attendant reached the custodian's room first and reported that Mr. Xu was coming. Upon entering the room, Xu Lun made as if to drop to his knees, but Dongpo held out his hands and stopped him. Now, this Xu Lun, being in charge of the prime minister's private study in the mansion, was someone to whom important officials from other places sent gifts and presented visiting cards when they asked to see the prime minister. So why would he want to kneel in Master Su's presence? It was because Master Su had been a regular visitor in the prime minister's mansion for so long that Xu Lun, who had been accustomed to serving him tea and waiting on him in the study, looked on him as an old master and could not very well put on airs the moment they met. (*Good analysis.*)

Out of consideration for the young man's pride, Master Su held him and said, "Mr. Xu, don't stand on ceremony with me."

"A custodian's room is no place for you," said Xu Lun. "Please go inside and have some tea in the east study." The east study was where the prime minister received students and close friends.

Xu Lun led Master Su into the east study, offered him a seat, and had a page boy serve tea.

"Master Su, I have to run an errand for my master to get some medicine at the medical bureau. I won't be able to wait on you here. What's to be done?"

"Please go ahead and do whatever you need to do."

After Xu Lun left, Dongpo looked around the room and saw that the bookshelves along the four walls were all locked and on the desk there were only a brush-pen and an ink slab. He opened the lid on top of the ink slab and found the slab to be a green one made in Duanxi [present-day Zhaoqing, Guangdong]. A splendid ink slab it was. On it, there was still some wet ink. He was about to close the lid when his eyes caught the corner of a piece of paper sticking out from underneath. Lifting the ink slab, he saw that it was a folded piece of white writing paper. He picked it up and found it to be an unfinished poem with only two lines. Titled "Ode to the Chrysanthemum," it was in the prime minister's handwriting.

Dongpo said to himself with a smile, "As the proverb says, 'A scholar who has been away for three days must be looked at in a different light.' Back in the days when I was serving in the capital, that old man was able to write thousands of words as fast as his brush-pen could go without even pausing for reflection. How things have changed in three years! Like the poet Jiang Yan [444–505], whose talent ran out in his old age, he can't even finish a poem now." After reading the two lines, he cried out, "Even these two lines are sheer nonsense!" What were these two lines?

The west wind swept through the garden last night,
Gilding the ground with petals of yellow.

Why did Dongpo say these two lines were sheer nonsense? Well, the wind of each of the four seasons has its own specific name. The wind of spring is "the gentle breeze," the wind of summer is "the southeasterly breeze," the wind of autumn is "the metal wind," and the wind of winter is "the north wind." The four names match the four seasons. The first line of the poem begins with mention of the west wind. Now, the west is represented by metal [one element of the five phases, which are metal, wood, water, fire, and earth], and the metal wind is the wind of autumn. When it starts to blow, the leaves of the *wutong* trees turn yellow, and flowers wither and fall. The second line says "Gilding the ground with petals of yellow." The "petals of yellow" are an obvious reference to chrysanthemums, which bloom in late autumn, and match the phase of fire. Defying autumn frost, the chrysanthemums survive the longest. However withered they become in the end, the petals do not fall. Isn't it a mistake to say that, swept by the wind, they are "gilding the ground"?

Quite carried away by his poetic mood, Dongpo took up the brush-pen, dipped it in the ink, and wrote two finishing lines in the same rhythm.

In autumn, flowers don't fall as in spring,
A fact for the poet to ponder.

(These two lines were actually written by Ouyang Xiu to make fun of Wang Anshi.[6] The storyteller is transplanting them to this story and falsely attributing them to the great Su Dongpo.)

After writing the two lines, Dongpo began to regret what he had done. "If the old man comes here to receive me, he'll see what I've written. It will be a breach of etiquette if I, a younger man, bandy words with him, face-to-face. But if I slip the sheet of paper into my sleeve and leave no trace of it, I'm afraid that when he finds it missing, Xu Lun will be in trouble." Without any idea as to the best course of action, he resignedly folded the sheet of paper as before, put the ink slab over it, closed the lid, and walked out of the study.

At the gate, he handed his résumé and visiting card to the custodian, saying, "When the prime minister comes out, tell him that Mr. Su waited for him for quite a while. Having just arrived in the capital, I haven't had time to get my documents ready. I'll come again tomorrow after I submit my documents to the morning court session." With that, he mounted his horse and returned to his lodgings.

Soon thereafter, the prime minister emerged from the mansion. Though the custodian had received instructions from Master Su, he did not bother to relay the latter's message because Master Su had not given him a gift. He just gave the prime minister Master Su's résumé and visiting card and showed him the visitors registration book. His mind preoccupied by the unfinished poem on chrysanthemums, the prime minister did not look at what he thought were some routine documents.

It so happened that, at this moment, Xu Lun came back from his errand. The prime minister had Xu take the medicine to the east study, while he himself fol-

lowed. After he sat down, he lifted the ink slab and took up the poem. After one look, he asked Xu Lun, "Who has been here?"

Dropping to his knees, Xu Lun said, "Master Su of Huzhou Prefecture was here to see you."

Now recognizing Academician Su's handwriting, the prime minister thought to himself, without saying anything out loud, "That little beast Su Shi is as flippant as ever, not yet subdued by the setbacks in his career! With his limited talent and learning, how dare he make fun of me? At tomorrow morning's court session, I'll submit a memorial to the emperor and have this man stripped of all official posts!" Then a second thought struck him. "Wait! He is not really to blame, because he doesn't know that chrysanthemums in Huangzhou [in present-day Hubei Province] do shed their petals." So thinking, he had Xu Lun bring the list of post vacancies in Huguang.[7] Checking for vacancies in Huangzhou Prefecture, he found that there was only a vacancy for a vice-commissioner of military training [a nominal post with no power]. He made a mental note of this before ordering Xu Lun to post the poem on a pillar in the room.

At the court session the following morning, he told the emperor privately that Su Shi, of inadequate learning and ability, should be demoted to the position of vice-commissioner of military training in Huangzhou. All the other officials who had come to the court for reappointments readily accepted their promotions, demotions, or removals from office. Su Shi was the only one full of resentment. Even though he knew all too well that the prime minister was seeking revenge on account of the poem and abusing his power because of a personal grudge, he could not do otherwise than mouth some obligatory words of gratitude to the emperor.

Back in the dressing room of the court, he had just removed his ceremonial robe when an attendant called out, "The prime minister is leaving the court!"

Dongpo went out the door to pay his respects. The prime minister, sitting in his sedan-chair, raised a hand and said, "Join me for lunch." Dongpo dutifully accepted the offer.

Upon returning to his lodgings, he sent his attendants and his butler, who had followed him from Huzhou, back to Huzhou to escort his family to Huangzhou, where his new post was to be. A little after eleven o'clock, Dongpo, wearing a white robe and a belt with decorations made of rhinoceros horn and equipped with a visiting card and a new résumé listing his new post in Huangzhou, rode to the prime minister's mansion for lunch. Upon being notified by the custodian, the prime minister said, "Invite him in."

In the main hall, the prime minister received Dongpo as he would a student. After the order for tea was given, the prime minister said, addressing him by his courtesy name Zizhan, "Your demotion to Huangzhou was the emperor's idea. Much as I wished to help, there was nothing I could do. You didn't blame me unjustly, did you, Zizhan?" (*Those wearing officials' gauze caps do make a habit of lying.*)

"How would your humble student dream of nursing a grudge against the prime minister? I know the limits of my learning and abilities."

The prime minister said with a laugh, "You are a great talent all right, but in Huangzhou, if you have a leisurely moment or two, you will do well to further your studies and broaden your knowledge." (*Doesn't that remark make your blood boil?*)

Now, Dongpo was a man who had read tens of thousands of books and was endowed with the talent of one thousand people put together. Why would he need advice to further his studies and broaden his knowledge? What more books were there for him to read?

"I thank you, sir, for your advice," said Dongpo, inwardly more infuriated than before.

The prime minister being a frugal man, the lunch consisted of nothing more than four dishes, three cups of wine, and just enough rice to be picked up at one time with a pair of chopsticks.

When Dongpo bid him farewell, the prime minister walked him out as far as the eaves of the house and, holding his hands, said, "In my diligent studies in younger days, I contracted an illness that has come back to me in my old age. The imperial physician says that the problem is caused by excessive phlegm and internal heat. I've been taking medicine, but the medicine only alleviates the symptoms without effecting a thorough cure. Yangxian tea is my only hope for a cure.[8] Whenever tributes of Yangxian tea are offered to the court, the emperor kindly passes them on to me. I asked the imperial physician about the correct way to make the tea, and I was told that I must use water from the middle gorge of the Three Gorges of the Yangzi River in Sichuan. I have tried several times to send someone there to fetch the water, but it never worked out. The messengers might not have really made an effort. Now you, Zizhan, are a native of that region. If, in your travels to visit your parents, you could fill a jar with water from the middle gorge and send the jar to me, I will be most grateful to you for prolonging my life."

Thus instructed, Dongpo went back to the Great State Councillor Monastery. The following day, he went to the court to bid farewell and left the capital for Huangzhou, traveling by day and by night.

Having heard of Dongpo as a famous scholar and a demoted member of the Hanlin Academy, all the Huangzhou prefectural officials went quite a distance from the city gate to welcome him. An auspicious day was then chosen for his inauguration. His family arrived more than a month later.

In Huangzhou, Dongpo developed a friendship with a certain Chen Jichang, a native of Sichuan. He spent his time touring the mountains and rivers, drinking wine, and composing poems, without doing a stroke of work on military and civil affairs.

Time flew. Almost one year elapsed. After the Double Ninth Festival, a strong wind rose and lasted for several days.[9] One day, after the wind had subsided, Dongpo

was sitting alone in the study when a thought struck him. "The yellow chrysanthemums that the abbot of Dinghui Monastery gave me have been planted in the backyard. Why don't I go take a look?" Before he had time to take one step, Chen Jichang came in. Overjoyed, Dongpo took him to the backyard to view the chrysanthemums. Upon reaching the chrysanthemum arbor, they saw that the ground was covered with golden chrysanthemum petals and the stems were bare, without a single petal left on them. Dongpo was aghast. For a good while, he stood transfixed in speechless amazement.

"Zizhan," said Chen Jichang, "what made you so startled when you saw the fallen chrysanthemum petals?"

"Listen to this, Jichang: I thought chrysanthemums usually wither and rot away without shedding their petals. Last year, in Prime Minister Wang's residence, I saw two lines that he had written, saying, 'The west wind swept through the garden last night, / Gilding the ground with petals of yellow.' Believing that the old man was mistaken, I finished the quatrain with two lines saying, 'In autumn, flowers don't fall as in spring, / A fact for the poet to ponder.' Well, what do you know! Chrysanthemums in Huangzhou do shed petals! So it was to make me witness this that the old man demoted me to Huangzhou!"

Chen Jichang said with a laugh, "The ancients put it well:

"Whatever you know, keep your mouth shut;
Whenever talked to, just nod your head.
If you don't even have to give a nod,
Your life will be free from worry and care."

Dongpo continued, "When I first learned about my demotion, I thought the prime minister was abusing his power to avenge himself on me because I pointed out his mistake. But as it turned out, he was right and I was wrong! Even those of true learning and insight, not to mention other people, can make mistakes. We must remember not to criticize or laugh at people too rashly. It's indeed a case of 'A fall into the pit, a gain in your wit.'" He then ordered that wine be served and sat down with Chen Jichang on the flower-strewn ground.

In the course of their drinking, the gatekeeper came to announce, "Prefect Ma is on his way here for a visit."

"Turn him away!" said Dongpo. That day, the two men drank and chatted until late in the evening.

The next day, Dongpo wrote a visiting card and went to see Prefect Ma to return the courtesy. The prefect stepped out of the house to greet him and then led him into a back hall, for prefectural yamens at that time did not have separate guest houses. After they took their seats as guest and host, tea was served. Then Dongpo related how, in the prime minister's residence the year before, he had made a mistake in a poem about chrysanthemums and thereby offended the prime minister.

With a smile, Prefect Ma said, "When I first came here, I didn't know either

that chrysanthemums in Huangzhou shed petals. I didn't believe it until I saw it with my own eyes. Clearly, the prime minister is a very knowledgeable man who knows all there is to know under the sun. It was in a momentary lapse that you, Academician Su, made a mistake. It might be worth your while to go to the capital to apologize to the prime minister. His anger will surely change to delight."

"I do wish to go, but there's no good reason for making the trip."

"I have something coming up that might be of help to you, but I'll have to ask a favor of you," said the prefect.

Dongpo asked what it was.

The prefect replied, "As a rule, a local official is sent to the capital each winter solstice with a message of greetings. If you don't find this mission too trivial, it would give you a good reason for going to the capital."

"Thank you so much, sir, for being so thoughtful. Yes, I'll be glad to take on the mission."

"But I'll have to bother you with the writing of this message, Academician Su."

Dongpo agreed.

Back in his own residence after taking leave of Prefect Ma, Dongpo remembered that the prime minister had asked for water from the middle gorge of the Three Gorges. Full of resentment at the time, he had totally forgotten about the request. Now, he made up his mind to render his service so as to make amends for his insolence. (*Sensible people correct their mistakes. They know better than to persist in willful ways.*) But this was not a matter to be lightly entrusted to other people. Since his wife was ill and growing nostalgic for their native place, he thought he might as well avail himself of the prefect's kind offer, ask for leave at the same time as the mission, and escort his family back to Sichuan to get water from the gorge, thus fulfilling two obligations at the same time. Because Huangzhou and Meizhou are separated by the Yangzi River, the journey to Meizhou, his native place, would take them right through the Three Gorges. Which three?

Xiling Gorge, Wu Gorge, and Gui Gorge.

Xiling Gorge is the upper one, Wu Gorge the middle one, and Gui Gorge the lower one. Xiling Gorge, to the east of Kuizhou Prefecture [in what is now Fengjie County, Sichuan], is also called Qutang Gorge, and between its two cliffs flows the Yangzi River. With the colossal Yanyu Rock serving as a gate at the mouth of Qutang Gorge, the Three Gorges are also called the Three Gorges of Qutang.[10] Stretching for more than seven hundred li, the section of the Yangzi River that flows between the Three Gorges is flanked on both sides by continuous, undulating, overlapping chains of hills that block out the sky and the sun. The wind blows not horizontally but vertically.

Kuizhou being at the midpoint in the more than four-thousand-li journey from Huangzhou to Meizhou, Dongpo thought to himself, "If I take the family all the way to Meizhou, the round trip will be almost ten thousand li, which means the delivery of the winter solstice greetings will be delayed. Why don't I take care of

official business and family duties at the same time? I can take the family to Kuizhou by land and let them go to Meizhou from there on their own while I take a boat at Kuizhou, travel down the gorges, collect some water at the middle gorge, and return to Huangzhou before I head for the Eastern Capital.[11] Wouldn't that be nice on both counts?"

Having thus drawn up his plans, he explained them to his wife, packed, and took leave of Prefect Ma. He had a tablet hung over the gate of the yamen, saying that the vice-commissioner of military training was on leave. On a chosen auspicious day, he prepared the means of transportation and assembled the servants, and the whole family started on their journey. It was an uneventful journey. It hardly needs to be said that

After Yiling, they came upon Gaotang.
Then, the footman's good news: Kuizhou was near.

After arriving in Kuizhou, Dongpo said good-bye to his wife and told his competent butler to take good care of the mistress the rest of the way. He himself hired a boat and rode downstream from Kuizhou.

Yanyu Rock, you see, stands all by itself at the mouth of the gorges, submerged in water in the summer and rising from the water again at the onset of winter. Because boatmen are not sure which way to go when the rock is submerged in water, the rock is also called the Rock of Hesitation. There is a saying that goes:

With Hesitation big as an elephant,
Do not go up the Qutang Gorges.
With Hesitation big as a horse,
Do not go down the Qutang Gorges.

Dongpo had set out after the Double Ninth Festival, and it was now late autumn, just before the onset of winter. It being a leap year with an extra eighth month and therefore another month before the end of autumn, the water was still high. Going upstream was much more time-consuming than going downstream. On his way to Kuizhou, Dongpo had chosen to travel by land instead of by boat because he had been afraid that the journey would take too long, but now that he was riding downstream, the boat glided rapidly down the river with the greatest ease. Impressed by the sight of the cliffs towering over the narrow strip of water, Dongpo waxed poetic, but his attempts at composing an "Ode to the Three Gorges" were unavailing. He sat by the table while trying to compose the poem, but, tired from successive days of travel, he ended up drifting off to sleep without leaving instructions for the boatmen to collect the water. (*Writing makes a mess of things.*)

By the time he woke up and asked where he was, they had passed the middle gorge and were at the lower gorge. "I need to collect water from the middle gorge," he said. "Turn the boat back, quick!"

The boatman said, "Sir, with the Three Gorges linked together, the water is

as rapid as a waterfall, and the boat goes as fast as an arrow. If we turn the boat back, it will be going upstream, and we can make only a few li a day, however hard we try."

Dongpo reflected a long while before saying, "We can anchor here. Are there people living around here?"

"It's impossible to anchor the boat by the cliffs of the two upper gorges, but at Gui Gorge, the hills and the river are not as rough, and there's a town just a short distance from the shore."

Dongpo ordered that the boat be anchored and said to his servant, "Go up the shore and if you can find someone old and knowledgeable, bring him back here, but don't say anything that might alarm him."

Thus instructed, the servant went ashore. A short while later, he brought back an old man.

"Please accept a deep bow, sir, from a local resident," said the old man.

Dongpo said to him reassuringly, "I'm just a traveler passing by here, not some official with local jurisdiction. I just want to ask you one thing: Which of the three gorges yields the best water?"

The old man replied, "The three gorges are all linked together with no break in between. The water flows nonstop, day and night, from the upper gorge to the middle one, and then from the middle one to the lower one. It's hard to say which gorge yields the best water because the water is the same throughout."

Dongpo thought to himself, "What a one-track mind the prime minister has! Why does he have to ask for water from the middle gorge when the three gorges are linked and the water from all three is the same?" So thinking, he had his attendants buy a clean porcelain jar from the locals at the official rate. Then he himself stood at the prow and watched the boatmen fill the jar to the brim with water from the lower gorge and wrap it up with paper. After he had affixed his own signature to the jar, the boat set sail again.

Back in Huangzhou, he called on Prefect Ma, and in the evening, he drafted the memorial of Winter Solstice greetings and had it sent to the prefect's residence. Upon reading the memorial, Prefect Ma was deeply impressed by Mr. Su's immense talent. The official in charge of matters relating to memorials to the court put Su Shi's name on the memorial, and on a chosen auspicious day, a farewell dinner was given in Dongpo's honor.

Carrying the memorial and the jar of Sichuan water with him, Dongpo traveled posthaste to the Eastern Capital before the night was out and took up lodgings in the Great State Councillor Monastery. Early the next morning, he mounted his horse and, followed by an attendant carrying the jar of water, went to visit the prime minister at his residence.

The prime minister was sitting idly when he heard the custodian announce, "Master Su, commissioner of military training from of Huangzhou, requests an audience!"

With a smile, the prime minister said, "So, one year has already gone by!" He turned to the custodian and said, "Take your time on your way out and then lead him to the east study." And so the custodian went to carry out the order.

The prime minister was the first to reach the study. At the sight of the poem posted on the pillar, blurred with dust that had accumulated over the year, he took a fly-whisk from a magpie-tail jar and whisked off the dust to reveal the poem, which looked the same as before. He then sat down solemnly.

Meanwhile, the custodian dawdled for quite some time before he invited Master Su in. Hearing that he was to be led into the east study, Dongpo reddened at the memory of his correction of the prime minister's poem. Reluctantly, he entered the mansion. Upon reaching the study, he dropped to his knees and bowed to the prime minister. Raising Dongpo to his feet, the prime minister said, "We are not meeting in the main hall precisely because you can feel more relaxed here, since you must be tired from the long journey. So don't be overly concerned about etiquette." So saying, he had a page boy show Dongpo his seat.

After sitting down, Dongpo looked furtively at the poem posted on the pillar directly opposite him.

Pointing to his left with the fly-whisk, the prime minister said, "Zizhan, how time flies! It's been a year since this poem was written!"

Dongpo rose from his seat and prostrated himself on the floor.

Raising him to his feet, the prime minister asked, "Why are you doing this, Zizhan?"

"Your humble student pleads guilty!"

"Is it because you saw fallen chrysanthemum petals in Huangzhou?"

"Yes."

"But you are not to blame, Zizhan, for not having seen this kind of chrysanthemum before."

"Please bear with this humble student's lack of talent and learning."

After tea, the prime minister asked, "Did you bring water from the middle gorge of the Three Gorges as I asked you to?"

"Yes, the jar is right at the entrance to the mansion."

At the prime minister's order, two attendants carried the jar into the study. The prime minister wiped the jar with his own sleeves and opened the seal on the paper wrappings. He then had a page boy start a fire in the tea stove and boil some water in a silver teakettle. In the meantime, he put a pinch of Yangxian tea leaves in a white porcelain bowl made by Dingzhou Kiln [in what is now Quyang, Hebei]. When the water boiled and bubbles like crabs' eyes appeared, he quickly lifted the kettle and poured some water into the bowl. It was quite a while before the water turned the color of tea.

"Where did you get the water?"

"From Wu Gorge."

"The middle gorge?"

"Yes."

The prime minister laughed. "There you go again, making a fool of this old man! This water is from the lower gorge. How can you claim that it's from the middle one?"

Aghast, Dongpo repeated what the local resident had said, that the three gorges were linked together, and the water was the same throughout. "I believed what I heard and indeed collected the water from the lower gorge. How can you tell?"

"A scholar devoted to learning should not be given to rash actions. Careful research is highly necessary. Had I not been to Huangzhou and seen the chrysanthemums there, how would I dare come up with a line about their shedding petals? As for the water of the Three Gorges, I read about it in the *Supplementary Commentary on The Waterways*.[12] Water from the upper gorge is too strong; water from the lower gorge is too weak. Only water from the middle one is neither too strong nor too weak. The imperial physician, being the wise physician that he is, knows that the source of my ailment lies in my stomach and therefore advises me to use water from the middle gorge to help the medicine work better. If water from the Three Gorges is used to brew Yangxian tea, that from the upper gorge has a strong flavor, that from the lower gorge tastes bland, and that from the middle one is neither too strong nor too bland. I can tell that your water is from the lower gorge because it took a long time for the water to turn the color of tea."

Dongpo left his seat and asked for forgiveness.

"What is there to forgive?" said the prime minister. "It's because you are so brilliant that you paid no attention to those things. I'm glad that you are here, because it so happens that I have nothing to do today. I have known you for quite some time now, but I can't say I know the extent of your knowledge. (*How humiliating!*) Now I will make so bold as to give you a little test."

Dongpo said with delight, "Please go ahead."

"Not so fast!" said the prime minister. "If I give you a test all of a sudden, I might be accused of bullying a younger man. Now, you give me a test first, before I benefit from your knowledge."

"How could I dream of doing that?" said Dongpo with a bow.

"So you don't want to test me, but I can't allow myself to be presumptuous. Oh well, I'll have Xu Lun open all the bookcases in the study. All twenty-four, three shelves each, are filled with books. Just pick a book at random and read any line aloud. If I can't come up with the next line, you can call me an ignorant man."

Dongpo thought to himself, "This old man does talk big! He can hardly have memorized all these books! Even though he says so, I can't very well put him to the test." So thinking, he said, "I would never dream of doing that!"

"Well, haven't you heard the saying 'The best way to show someone respect is to follow his orders'?"

So Dongpo cunningly set about searching among the dusty books, thinking that if the prime minister had not read these books in a long time, he would have

forgotten the lines. He picked a book at random and, without finding the name of the author, opened it at the middle and read a line out loud: "'How is the Delightful One?'"

Without missing a beat, the prime minister said, "'I have eaten him up.' Is that correct?"

"Yes."

Taking the book from Dongpo, the prime minister asked, "What do you make of these lines?"

Dongpo had not read the lines closely and thought, "In satires about Empress Wu Zetian, people of the Tang dynasty gave Xue Aocao the epithet 'The Delightful One.'[13] Maybe the empress sent someone to inquire after him, hence the first line. But the answer 'I have eaten him up' doesn't make sense." After reflecting a while, he thought, "I'd better not irritate the old man. One phrase admitting the truth is better than a thousand far-fetched guesses." So thinking, he said out loud, "This humble student does not know."

The prime minister said, "This is not some book of great obscurity. How can you not know? (*How humiliating!*) Here's the little story: Under the reign of Emperor Ling [108–188], toward the end of the Han dynasty, there was a fox pit tens of feet deep behind Mount Wugang in Changsha Prefecture [in present-day Hunan]. In the pit lived two nine-tail foxes that, in their long lives, had acquired the magic power of metamorphosis and often assumed the forms of beautiful women to lure male passersby into their pit for sexual pleasure. Those who failed to gratify them fully were eaten up between the two of them.

"Now, there was a man by the name of Liu Xi, who was accomplished in the art of lovemaking. When he was picking medicinal herbs in the mountains, the two evil spirits captured him, and at night, when they sought intimacy, he applied the same method one would use when tending a fire, adding or reducing fuel as the occasion demanded. The two foxes were so fully gratified that they called him The Delightful One. When the big fox was out on the mountain looking for food, the small fox kept watch on him. When the small fox went out, the big fox stayed with him. With the passing of time, the foxes relaxed their alertness, and, one day, after drinking some wine, they revealed their true forms, giving Liu Xi such a shock that his stamina began to wane.

"One day, when the big fox was out looking for food, the small fox in the pit asked for clouds and rain, but the man failed to gratify her.[14] The small fox flew into a rage and ate Liu Xi up. Upon returning to the pit, the big fox asked, thinking of Liu Xi, 'How is the Delightful One?' The small fox replied, 'I have eaten him up.' The two foxes chased each other all over the mountain. A woodchopper heard their screams, and what he witnessed came to be recorded in *The Complete History of the Last Years of the Han Dynasty.*[15] You have never heard of this story, Zizhan?"

Dongpo said in reply, "How can what little I know be compared to your vast knowledge, sir?"

"So, I have been put to the test," said the prime minister with a smile. "Now it's my turn to test you. Be sure to share your knowledge with me!"

"Please make it easy, sir."

"If I test you on other things, I'll be accused of trying to put you on the spot, but I've long heard that you are good at providing a missing line to form a matching couplet [*zuodui*].[16] (*Preposterous!*) This year is a leap year with an extra eighth month. We had the beginning of spring in the first month and it will come around again in the twelfth month, giving us a year with spring at both ends. With this as a theme, I will now write something for you to match, and for me to admire your talent." Thereupon, he had a page boy bring over a piece of paper and a brush-pen and wrote the following two lines:

One year, two springs and double eighth months;
Two years go by within the space of one.

However talented he was, Dongpo found himself unable, on the spur of the moment, to come up with another two lines to match those bizarre ones. His face went crimson in embarrassment.

The prime minister continued, "When you traveled from Huzhou to Huangzhou, did you go by Suzhou and Runzhou [present-day Zhenjiang]?"

"Yes, they do lie on the way."

"The road from the Jinchang Gate of Suzhou to Huqiu is called Hill Pond Road. The midpoint of this approximately seven-li road is called Half Pond. Runzhou, called in ancient times Iron Jar Town, borders on the Yangzi River, with three hills overlooking the city. They are Gold Hill, Silver Hill, and Jade Hill. All of these places have Buddhist temples and monasteries. Have you seen them all?"

"Yes, I have."

"Now, let me again give you a couple of lines about Suzhou and Runzhou, for you to think of lines to match."

The two lines about Suzhou are as follows:

Three and a half li, and you reach Half Pond,
Midpoint in the seven-li Hill Pond Road.

Next, the two lines about Runzhou:

Standing to the west of Iron Jar Town,
Three piles of treasure: Gold, Silver, and Jade.

Dongpo thought for a long time without being able to come up with matching lines. Seeing no other way, he apologized and took leave of his host.

Knowing full well that Dongpo had been treated somewhat unfairly, the prime minister was in fact, still appreciative of his talent. (*Deep down, this old man is not a bad sort after all.*) The following day, he submitted a memorial to Emperor Shenzong, by force of which Dongpo was reinstated as a Hanlin Academician.

In later times, someone commenting on these events said: Even a genius like Su Dongpo was humiliated three times by Wang Anshi, duke of Jing. Imagine what would happen to those less gifted than Su! Hence the following poem to caution the world:

Confucius honored Xiang as his teacher,[17]
But Wang Anshi had to torment Dongpo.
Modesty is the best human virtue;
The pursuit of knowledge knows no end.

4

In the Hall Halfway-up-the-Hill, the Stubborn One Dies of Grief

Try to prolong your life while you still can;
Seize the moments of joy when they come your way.
With heaven disposing human affairs,
Why do you have to worry yourself sick?
Relax! Think nothing of the trivial things!
Life's ups and downs are more than can be told.
The lavish Gold Valley Garden turned to dust;[1]
The once mighty Han Xin died a tragic death.[2]
Wu Zixu, the hero of Lintong fame,[3]
Was reduced to playing the flute for food.
When in luck, weeds outshine the spring flowers;
When out of luck, pure gold loses to rough iron.
You're better off if happy and carefree;
This you will know when old age sets in.
Be content with simple food and clothes
And live modestly throughout your life.

Having thus begun, let me take more time and cite four lines from a Tang dynasty poem before I launch into the story proper:

The duke of Zhou lived in fear of rumors;
Wang Mang won the hearts of his followers.
If they had died before the truth came out,
Who would have known them to be what they truly were?[4]

This quatrain says in essence that there are honest people and there are hypocrites and that one must learn to see good in those who appear to be evil and evil in those who appear to be good.

The first line of the quatrain is about the duke of Zhou, surname Ji and given name Dan, who was a younger son of King Wen of the Zhou dynasty [ca. 1027–256 B.C.E.]. A man of saintly virtue, he helped his older brother, who later became

King Wu, overthrow the Shang dynasty and found the Zhou dynasty, which was to last for eight hundred years. When King Wu fell ill, the duke wrote a prayer to heaven, asking to die in the king's place, a prayer that he hid in a golden box without anyone's knowledge. After King Wu died, the duke held the young King Cheng, King Wu's son, the crown prince, on his lap in court sessions with the feudal lords. The lord of Guan [Ji Xian] and the lord of Cai [Ji Du], both King Wu's half brothers born of concubines, harbored designs upon the throne and, jealous of the duke of Zhou, spread rumors, accusing him of bullying the young king and planning to usurp the throne before long. King Cheng did grow suspicious. The duke resigned from his post as prime minister and went to an eastern region, where he lived in fear as a recluse.

One day, during a raging storm, a clap of thunder shook open the golden box. It was only after King Cheng saw the duke's written prayer that he realized the duke's loyalty. The duke was brought back and reinstated as prime minister. The lord of Guan and the lord of Cai were executed, and the house of Zhou regained peace. If the duke of Zhou had fallen ill and died soon after the lord of Guan and the lord of Cai had started spreading rumors that accused him of harboring designs of betrayal, and if the golden box containing the prayer had remained closed and King Cheng's suspicions had never been dispelled, who would have been there to defend the duke? Wouldn't such a man of virtue have gone down in history as a villain?

The second line of the quatrain is about Wang Mang [45 B.C.E.–23 C.E.], courtesy name Jujun, an uncle of Emperor Ping [r. 1–5 C.E.] of the Western Han dynasty. He was an evil man who, emboldened by his kinship with the much favored empress, exercised enormous power as prime minister and set his sights on the throne.[5] However, afraid of opposition from the populace, he went out of his way to present the image of a modest man respectful of decorum and worthy men. He gave every appearance of acting in the name of justice and overstated his accomplishments. Throughout the land, there were four hundred eighty-seven thousand five hundred and seventy-two people who submitted memorials in eulogy of him. Knowing that he had enough popular support, he poisoned Emperor Ping, dismissed the empress dowager, ascended the imperial throne, and changed the dynastic title to Xin (New), a dynasty that lasted for eighteen years before it was overthrown by Liu Xiu [later to be Emperor Guangwu] of Nanyang, who rose in arms to restore the house of Han. Had Wang Mang died eighteen years earlier, he would very well have gone down in history as a good prime minister of impeccable integrity, and wouldn't a villain have thus passed as a good man? That is why the ancients said, "It takes time to get to know a person's heart," and also, "Only when the lid is closed on one's coffin can final judgment be passed on the person." It will never do to take someone as a gentleman on account of a few transient words of praise, nor can one condemn a man as a villain on the basis of similarly short-lived words of slander. There is a poem that bears witness:

Never heed words of praise or slander;
Right or wrong will be made known in the end.
If idle words are given credence,
The wise will cry out at the injustice.

Now I propose to tell of a prime minister in an earlier dynasty. Before his rise to power, he enjoyed a fine reputation, but once in power, he willfully committed all manner of outrages, for which he came to be showered with curses, and in the end he died with a grievance in his heart. If he had died in peaceful slumber at the height of his reputation, people would have deeply lamented such a loss to the country. A good man like this, not yet in a position commensurate with his great ability, would have left behind a good name. But by the time he was showered with curses, even death could not have saved him. He should not have lived those extra years in the first place!

Who was this prime minister? Which dynasty was it? Well, the dynasty is not too distant from us, nor is it too near. During the reign of Emperor Shenzong [r. 1068–85] of the Northern Song dynasty, there was a prime minister, a native of Linchuan [in present-day Jiangxi], by the name of Wang Anshi [1021–1086]. He was able to take in ten lines at one glance and had read ten thousand books. Famous court ministers like Wen Yanbo [1006–1083], Ouyang Xiu, Zeng Gong [1019–1083], and Han Wei all marveled at his talent.[6] He was barely twenty years old when he gained instant fame upon passing the imperial examinations on the first try. He started from the post of magistrate of Yin County in Qingyuan Prefecture, Zhejiang, where he made a name for himself by initiating good practices and eliminating harmful ones and was promoted to be prefectural notary for the administrative assistant of Yangzhou.

He often read all night through without a wink of sleep, and when the sun was high and he heard that the prefect was holding a session, he would rush over without first washing his face and rinsing his mouth. The prefect of Yangzhou at the time was Han Qi, duke of Wei. Seeing Wang Anshi's unkempt appearance, he attributed this neglect of personal hygiene to nocturnal indulgence in wine and admonished Wang to devote more time to reading. Wang thanked the prefect for his advice without uttering a word in his own defense. Later, upon learning that the man often read through the night, Mr. Han was deeply impressed and grew even more enthusiastic in his praises. (*Such a man is indeed hard to come by.*) So Wang Anshi was promoted again and became the prefect of Jiangning. His good name spread far and wide, and reached the ears of the emperor. Truly,

Through good deeds done early in his career,
He gained fame and ruined the land for years to come.

Now, Emperor Shenzong, the Son of Heaven, was an emperor who would go to any length to make the empire prosperous. Upon hearing of Wang Anshi's good

repute, the emperor went out of his way to make him a Hanlin Academician in the capital. When the emperor asked him about ways to rule the land, Wang cited the examples of Yao and Shun, a reply that immensely pleased the Son of Heaven.[7] Barely two years had gone by before he was made prime minister and enfeoffed as the duke of Jing.

All in the court rejoiced over what they thought was the rebirth of Gao Yao, Kui, Yi Yin, and the duke of Zhou.[8] There was a Li Chengzhi, however, who predicted that Wang Anshi would surely wreak havoc throughout the land because, with more white than black in his eyes, he had the look of an evil man. Su Xun, in his turn, believed that Wang Anshi's slovenliness and neglect of personal hygiene, to the extent of forgetting to wash his face for months on end, bespoke a lack of the human touch and wrote an essay titled "On Recognizing Characteristics of Evil Men" in order to mock him.[9] (*One judged by a facial feature, and the other judged by general appearance. Both men were proved right. Why?*) However, these two men stood alone. Who would believe them? But let us go on with the story.

Now that he was prime minister, Wang Anshi gained the favor of Emperor Shenzong, who followed all of Wang's advice and promulgated a series of new policies. What policies were they?

> *The farmland policy, the water conservancy and irrigation policy, the crop loans policy, the local goods transportation policy, the militia policy, the corvée commutation policy, the market trading policy, the horse care policy, the land grids policy, and the guild tax policy.*[10]

Wang followed only the advice of an evil man named Lü Huiqing [1032–1111] and of his own son Wang Pang [1044–1076]. They consulted one another day and night, reprimanded and expelled those loyal to the court, and rejected remonstrations. Cries of discontent were heard throughout the country, and the occurrence of unusual natural phenomena rose in frequency. The duke of Jing, however, remained as opinionated as ever, asserting that there were three things that one would do well to ignore:

> *Natural phenomena need not be feared;*
> *Idle gossip need not be taken seriously;*
> *The ancestors' laws need not be observed.*

He was a stubborn man. Once his mind was made up, not even Buddha could talk him out of it. Hence his nickname "The Stubborn One." (*It is possible to bring evil people around to doing good deeds, but the stubborn ones do not change their ways and are, therefore, greater evils.*) Many famous court ministers, such as Wen Yanbo and Han Qi, who had sung his praises, began to regret their mistake. One after another, they submitted memorials to present their views but were invariably rejected, whereupon they handed in their resignations and left the court. Henceforth, Wang Anshi became more determined in enforcing the new policies. Numerous changes

were made to the laws established by the ancestors, resulting in unemployment on a massive scale.

One day, his beloved son Wang Pang died of an ulcer. Overcome with grief, the duke of Jing summoned eminent monks from all over the land and held a forty-nine-day prayer service to ensure that the spirit of the deceased would be spared the torments of hell. The duke personally lit the incense and presented the farewell speech.

Upon completion of the forty-nine-day service, the duke was lighting incense to send off the Buddha at the fourth watch of the night when he suddenly fainted and collapsed on the prayer mat.[11] Despite the efforts of the attendants around him, he did not come to. It was at the fifth watch that he woke up as if from a dream. "How very strange!" he said. "How very strange!" The attendants raised him and helped him enter the middle door of the house. From there, his wife, Lady of Wuguo, had maidservants escort him into the bedchamber, where she asked him what had happened.

With tears in his eyes, he said, "When I was in a coma a moment ago, I was dimly aware of arriving at a place that looked like a big, imposing yamen with its gate closed. I saw our son Wang Pang in a huge cangue too heavy for him, a cangue that must have weighed a hundred catties.[12] With disheveled hair, a dirty face, and blood all over him, he stood in front of the gate and tearfully poured out his woes to me, saying, 'I'm here because the King of Hell accuses me of being the son of a highly placed man who, instead of committing himself to good deeds, stubbornly persists in his willful ways and enacts new laws like the crop loans law—laws that bring calamity to the land and the people and cause rancor to rise all the way to heaven. Your ill-starred son's career in the human world was brought to an end before yours, and I am being punished for crimes far greater than prayer services can redeem. Father, you'd better change your ways as soon as possible. Do not cling to wealth and rank.' Before he was quite finished, the gate opened, someone shouted an order, and I woke up."

His wife said, "Well, 'To believe is better than not to believe,' as the saying goes. I, too, have heard many complaints against you. Why don't you resign before your career goes downhill? One less day in office is one less day of being cursed at."

Following his wife's advice, the duke of Jing submitted about ten memorials in succession, requesting permission to resign on grounds of ill health. The emperor, not unaware of public opinion, had also grown weary of him. The request was approved, and he was made commissioner of Jiangning Prefecture.[13]

During the Song dynasty, retired prime ministers were all given posts in local governments and were paid salaries without having to do any work. The duke of Jing was most delighted to be sent to Jiangning, because Jiangning, being the ancient city of Jinling and former capital of the Six Dynasties, was an opulent place with beautiful scenery and fashionable people, a place where he could very well settle down to a comfortable life. Before departure, his wife donated all of her jewelry

and other prized possessions worth thousands of pieces of gold to nunneries and monasteries, held prayer services, and burned incense to seek blessings for their son Wang Pang in the netherworld.

On a chosen day, Wang Anshi took leave of the imperial court, ready to set off on his journey. The assembly of court officials prepared farewell dinners for him, but he declined, pleading illness. In his residence, there was a clerk by the name of Jiang Ju, who was quite good at getting things done. This man he took with him, along with servants and page boys for his family.

From the Eastern Capital to Jinling, they traveled by water. The duke chose not to use a ship provided by the court but, wearing commoner's clothes, hired a small boat and drifted down the Yellow River.

Before the boat got under way, he summoned Jiang Ju, the servants, and the page boys and said to them, "I have already resigned as prime minister. Wherever we moor the boat along the way, should anyone ask about my name and rank, just say that we are travelers passing by this area. Do not, on any account, tell them the truth, because I'm afraid that if the local officials hear about it, they'll come to greet me and to see me off, or even hire guards to provide protection. That would be putting the local inhabitants to too much trouble. If my identity does leak out, I'll assume that you have given out my name for the purpose of extorting bribes from the local people, and if I do hear that you've done that, you can be sure the punishment will be heavy."

"We understand."

Jiang Ju said, "Now that you are dressed like a commoner, traveling with a hidden identity, what if we run across people who don't know better and speak ill of you?"

The duke replied, "As the saying goes, 'A prime minister's heart is big enough to pole a boat in.' Idle gossip should never be taken seriously. Kind words about me do not make me complacent. Criticisms of me do not make me angry. Just take them as a puff of wind passing by your ears. Whatever you do, don't invite trouble."

Jiang Ju passed the instructions on to the boatmen. And the journey went smoothly with nothing of note happening.

Before they knew it, they found themselves in Zhongli County more than twenty days later. In the past, the duke had an ailment caused by excessive phlegm and internal heat. So many miserable days spent in the small boat brought the ailment back. Wishing to go ashore to view the sights and the markets and take his mind off his misery, he told his butler, "We're not far from Jinling now. You take good care of the mistress and continue the journey by boat, crossing the river from Guabu and Huaiyang.[14] I'll go by land and meet you at the mouth of the river at Jinling." So Wang Anshi saw his family off, and they continued their journey by boat, while he went ashore, along with Jiang Ju, a servant, and a page boy, forming a company of four.

By boat on water, by carriage on land,
Travelers get wherever they want to go.

Jiang Ju said, "If you travel by land, sir, you will have to hire some porters. Shall I go to the county courier station, present them with the official letter from the court, and get porters for free, or do you want to hire some at your own expense?"

The duke replied, "I've already told you not to bother local authorities. Go hire some men with my money."

"In that case," said Jiang Ju, "we'll have to find a broker."

With the servant and the page boy carrying the baggage, Jiang Ju led the duke to see a broker. The host greeted them, offered them seats of honor, and asked, "Where are you going?"

"To Jiangning," said the duke. "We would like to rent a sedan-chair and three mules or horses. We'll be on our way immediately."

"Things are not the way they were before," said the broker. "You'll have to wait a while."

"Why?" asked the duke.

"It's a long story! Since the Stubborn One came to power and established new laws, people have been reduced to poverty, and many fled from here. (*This denunciation against him is the first of many more to come all along this journey.*) The few poor families who stay behind are so busy running errands for the government that no one is free for hire. Moreover, the local people have been made so poor that they can't even fill their stomachs, not to speak of having spare money to raise horses and mules. The few there are can't meet the demand. Now you sit here, while I go find some for you. If I succeed, don't rejoice. If I fail, don't complain, but whatever I find will cost twice as much as before!"

"Who is the Stubborn One?" asked Jiang Ju.

"It's Wang Anshi. They say he has more white in his eyes than black. That's the look of an evil man."

The duke lowered his eyelids and told Jiang Ju not to poke his nose into other people's affairs.

After a long while, the broker came back and said, "You can only have two sedan-chair carriers. A third one is nowhere to be found. Those two want to be paid as four, because there will be no one to relieve them. There's no horse. I managed to find only a mule and a donkey. You can come to my place tomorrow morning at the fifth watch to be picked up. If you agree, you must pay them a deposit now."

Displeased by the bitter words against him a while earlier, the duke could hardly wait to be on his way. He thought to himself, "If we go slowly, having only two men shouldn't be a problem. But we are one animal short. The only choice is to let Jiang Ju have one. The page boy and the servant can take turns riding the other

one." Thereupon, he told Jiang Ju not to haggle over the price but to pay whatever the broker asked. Accordingly, Jiang Ju weighed out some silver and paid the broker.

As it was still early in the day and staying in the broker's house was too boring, the duke had the page boy follow him and went out for a stroll down the streets. Indeed, what he saw was a desolate place with few shops in business. The sight saddened him, but he kept his feelings to himself. His steps took him to a teahouse that looked clean enough. He walked in and was about to order some tea when his eyes fell upon a quatrain written on the wall. (*This is the second time.*)

The old system was judicious and sound;
For a hundred years, peace reigned in the land.
But along came the stubborn white-eyed man
To force changes that bring chaos and pain.

Written below, in lieu of the author's signature, were the words "Anonymous but indignant at the way things are."

The duke sank into silence. Losing all interest in the tea, he promptly left the place. A few hundred steps farther on, he saw a temple. "Why don't I go in to look around and while away the time?" The gate led to three halls of worship. Before he crossed the threshold to bow, he saw, posted on the vermilion wall, a piece of yellow paper with a poem written on it. (*The third time.*)

The last five emperors gave the land peace.
Why bother to bring changes here and there?
If Yao and Shun are models to follow,
Help the court's wise rule, as did Yi and Zhou![15]
He ousted old ministers of the court;
His new laws brought ruin to the people.
The Cozy Nest man, if you remember,
Once told the future by the cuckoo's cries.

During the reign of the previous emperor, Emperor Yingzong [r. 1064–67], there was a wise man by the name of Shao Yong, alias Yaofu, who was well versed in the laws of the cosmos and knew everything there was to know about heaven and earth. He called his residence "The Cozy Nest." In one of his frequent walks with friends on the Heavenly Ford Bridge in Luoyang, he heard the cries of a cuckoo. With a sigh, he said, "There will be chaos throughout the land!" When asked the meaning of that remark, he said, "If the land is to enjoy peace and order, the earth's energy should travel from the north to the south. If the land is to be torn by chaos, the earth's energy travels from the south to the north. No cuckoos have ever been seen in Luoyang before, and yet today, I heard one. This is a sign that the earth's energy is going from the south to the north. Before long, the Son of Heaven is

going to appoint a southerner as prime minister. That man will abolish the laws our ancestors established, and the land will know no peace till the end of our Song dynasty." And that prophecy had now been borne out by Wang Anshi.

After silently reading the poem once, the duke asked an acolyte, "Who wrote this poem? There's no signature."

"A few days ago," replied the acolyte, "a monk came here and asked for a piece of paper on which to write a poem. Then he posted it on the wall, saying it was a criticism of a certain Stubborn One."

The duke peeled off the sheet of paper, hid it in his sleeve, and went out without a word. He returned to the broker's house, where he spent a none-too-cheerful night.

At the first crow of roosters at the fifth watch, the two porters arrived, along with a man leading a mule and a donkey. Without combing his hair and washing himself, as was his wont, the duke mounted the sedan-chair. Jiang Ju rode the donkey, and the servant and the page boy took turns riding the mule. Around noontime, after traveling about forty li, they arrived at a small town. Jiang Ju dismounted, took a step forward, and said to the prime minister, "Sir, it's time for lunch."

Because of the recurrence of the duke's ailment, his servants had brought along some lung-clearing dried cakes, tea cakes, and pills. The duke told his men, "Bring me a bowl of hot water before you go ahead and eat your lunch." The duke steeped some tea in the hot water and ate some of the dried cakes. While his men were still at lunch, he saw a lavatory by the side of a house. He asked for a piece of toilet paper and stepped inside. There, on the earthen wall, he saw an eight-line poem written in white lime (*The fourth time.*):

When in Yin County before his time had come,
He had much support in his undeserved fame.
How wise Su Xun was in detecting evil!
How accurate Li Chengzhi's predictions!
He ousted the good and monopolized power;
He bred deception and brought on chaos.
Most odious were his words "need not be,"
Words that live in infamy down the years.

After finishing what he had to do, the duke took advantage of a moment when no one was looking in his direction to remove the square shoe from his left foot and wipe the characters on the wall until they became blurred. When his men came back from lunch, he remounted the sedan-chair and resumed the journey.

Some thirty li later, they came upon a courier station. Jiang Ju said, "This government establishment looks spacious enough. Let's spend the night there."

"What did I tell you yesterday?" demanded the duke. "Wouldn't we be inviting probing questions if we take up quarters here tonight? It would be safer to go to the next village and pick a local resident's house in a quiet corner."

Another five li later, as dusk began to set in, they came upon a villager's thatched house with a bamboo fence and a firewood door left ajar. Instructed by the duke to go up to the house and ask to be put up for the night, Jiang Ju pushed open the gate and approached the door. An elderly man with a cane stepped out and asked what they wanted.

"We are travelers," replied Jiang Ju, "wishing to spend the night in your honorable house. We will pay you at the going rate."

"Please make yourselves comfortable," said the old man.

Jiang Ju led the duke into the house to meet the host. The old man offered the duke the seat of honor. Seeing that Jiang Ju and the other two stood to one side, he realized that he was looking at a man of exalted status, and so he took the three attendants into a side room. While the old man was away, making preparations for tea and supper, the duke saw an eight-line poem written in bold characters on the newly whitewashed wall. (*The fifth.*) The poem said,

Say not that his writings are divinely inspired;
Those who see through his fallacies are few.
His defense in the quail case was unjust;[16]
His eating of fish-bait not without motive.[17]
His evil plots have fulfilled his ambitions;
His stubborn ways will give him infamy after he dies.
The sight of his cangued son in the netherworld
Revealed to him the truth of heavenly justice.

The poem plunged the duke into low spirits. In a short while, the old man served supper. The servants fell to heartily. The duke also helped himself to a little bit of the food.

"Who wrote the poem on the wall?" he asked the old man.

"It was done by a traveler passing by. I don't know his name."

His head bent, the duke thought to himself, "My defense in the case of the quail and my eating the fish-bait by mistake are incidents known to the public. But my son's wearing a cangue in the netherworld is something I told only to my wife. No one else could have known about it. Why has it come up in that poem? How very strange!"

Puzzled by the poem's last two lines, which had struck a sore spot, he asked the old man, "May I ask your venerable age?"

"I'm seventy-eight."

"How many sons do you have?"

That question brought tears to the old man's eyes. "I had four sons, but they all died. There's only me and my wife living here now."

"How did all four of them die?"

"Over the last ten years, the new laws have brought us great suffering. (*The sixth time.*) My sons took on the responsibility of managing the household, but they