

THE P'ENG-YA ROAD

Tu Fu

Translated by Eric Pankey

I remember we went north
and not without hardship
as we fled the rebels.
When the hills were white
with moon we left Po-shui
on the P'eng-ya road.

We traveled the distance on foot
and whenever we saw a stranger
along the road we felt shame.

Here and there sparrows called in the ravines.
We met no one returning from the opposite direction.

My young daughter bit me in her hunger.
I held her close to my chest
because I feared her crying
might bring wolves or even tigers.
She squirmed and cried louder.
And soon my son was eating
the sour plums found along the road . . .

Thunderstorms darkened
five of the ten days we traveled.
We walked hand and hand
struggling to make our way through mud.
The eroded path was slippery
and our clothes were black with rain.
After such difficulties one day
we covered only two miles.

Mornings we waded through cold water
among the smoothed stones;
evenings we rested at the sky's ledge
beneath a gray mist.
The low pine branches provided
temporary shelter and we ate
what blackberries we could find.

At last we made a short pause
in our journey near the T'ng-chia Marsh
before we continued.

My dear friend Sun Tsai lived
just below the Lu-tzu Pass—
there his kindness reached
beyond the gathering clouds.

We arrived in pitch dark;
gates were swung open
one after another to admit us.
Warm water was brought
and we bathed our feet.
Around us servants lit lamps.
Strips of paper were cut and hung
to recall my wandering soul.

His wife and children greeted us
and cried to see our condition.

My poor children had to be woke
when platters of food
were carried into the hall . . .

We should swear always to be like brothers!
Sun Tsai said and the hall was prepared for us
and we felt at home.

In uncertain times
how have I found such trust?

A year has past since we separated.
Still the rebels fight in the south.
How I wish I were a heron, Sun Tsai,
that I might fly at once to be with you again.