

Song of P'eng-ya

Tu Fu

I remember when we first fled the rebels,¹
hurrying north over dangerous trails;
night deepened on P'eng-ya Road,²
the moon shone over White-water Hills.
5 A whole family endlessly trudging,
begging without shame from the people we met:
valley birds sang, a jangle of soft voices;
we didn't see a single traveler returning. **F**
The baby girl in her hunger bit me;
10 fearful that tigers or wolves would hear her cries,
I hugged her to my chest, muffling her mouth,
but she squirmed and wailed louder than before.
The little boy pretended he knew what was happening;
importantly he searched for sour plums to eat.
15 Ten days, half in rain and thunder,
through mud and slime we pulled each other on.
There was no escaping from the rain,
trails slick, clothes wet and clammy;
getting past the hardest places,
20 a whole day advanced us no more than three or four li.³
Mountain fruits served for rations,
low-hung branches were our rafter and roof. **G**
Mornings we traveled by rock-bedded streams,
evenings camped in mists that closed in the sky.
25 We stopped a little while at the marsh of T'ung-chia,⁴
thinking to go out by Lu-tzu⁵ Pass;

1. rebels: troops led by the traitorous general An Lu-shan, who attacked and captured the

Chinese capital of Ch'ang-an in A.D. 756.

2. P'eng-ya (p'ung yá) Road: a road to the town of P'eng-ya, about 130 miles north of Ch'ang-an.

Tu Fu and his family passed through P'eng-ya as they sought safety from the rebel forces.

3. three or four li (lì): less than a mile and a half.

4. T'ung-chia (t'ung ch'ia)

an old friend there, Sun Tsai,⁶
ideals higher than the piled-up clouds;
he came out to meet us as dusk turned to darkness,
30 called for torches, opening gate after gate,
heated water to wash our feet,
cut strips of paper to call back our souls.⁷
Then his wife and children came;
seeing us, their tears fell in streams. **H**
35 My little chicks had gone sound to sleep;
he called them to wake up and eat from his plate,
said he would make a vow with me,
the two of us to be brothers forever.
At last he cleared the room where we sat,
40 wished us goodnight, all he had at our command.
Who is willing, in the hard, bleak times,
to break open, lay bare his innermost heart?
Parting from you, a year of months has rounded,
Tartar tribes⁸ still plotting evil,
45 and I think how it would be to have strong wings
that would carry me away, set me down before you. **I**

Translated by Burton Watson

6. Sun Tsai (sūn' tzi').
7. cut strips of paper to call back our souls: it was believed that the soul could leave the body and be frightened. The ritual referred to here was intended to restore the souls of the frightened.
8. Tartar tribes: the forces of An Lu-shan.

F AUTHOR'S MESSAGE

Reread lines 1-8. What has happened to the speaker and his family?

G AUTHOR'S MESSAGE

Reread lines 9-22. What images strongly convey the physical hardship of refugee life?

H AUTHOR
Reread lines 30-35. The phrases "higher than clouds" and "streams" of figurative language. What do they do?

I AUTHOR
Describe the feeling, the poet does the message of hope?