

## THE P'ENG-YA ROAD

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*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.