The P'eng-Ya Road

Tu Fu
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.