

## DOCTOR HONG

"You know, at my hospital it takes now about a month and a half to reserve an ultrasound test like this." Gong said to Dr. Hong while leaning up against the fountain in the autumn sunshine.

"With my permanent visa status now in Canada, I could leave China with Lu and Little Hong. I've never been at a crossroads like this before." Dr. Hong confessed.

"Gentlemen, sorry to bother you. In my sack, I'm carrying a dozen turtles. These turtles were not raised in the city, but in the countryside in my uncle's pond near Shaoyang. Would you like a crack at them?"

"Move along," Gong waved him off but Dr. Hong raised his head, looked at the peasant and said,

"Turtles you say?"

Gong smiled a little knowing that Dr. Hong's weakness was anything that has been pulled from the water.

"Turtles, yes sir!" As he bent over to quickly take one from the sack he continued, "As you know, the rewards of turtle meat are health and a long life. If you have a sick relative here at the hospital, what better medication could he or she receive than a bit of turtle soup?" The peasant held one out to Dr. Hong for a look. Dr. Hong did not accept keeping one hand in his pocket and the other with the burning cigarette by his side.

"I caught these turtles myself just two days ago so you now they are active," he said setting the turtle on the ground below their feet.

Gong rolled the turtle on his back with the end of his shoe. As the turtle's legs kicked upward, he looked over the design of the exposed bottom, "If these turtles come all the way from where? Shaoyang?"

"Near Shaoyang."

"Then why would you come all the way to the Children's Hospital here in the capital city?" He finished inquisitively.

"I can tell by the smoothness of your hands that you two men come from education and by your accent of your speech that you two come from a different province, up north perhaps. Then maybe you can understand my dilemma."

Dr. Hong with continued interest put out his cigarette with the bottom of his shoe and said, "And what comrade is your dilemma?"

Pulling a turtle from the sack, the farmer continued, "I am a married man. I live with my older sister and mother. We work hard growing rice and vegetables and we get by. Last year younger brother, who has smooth hands much like yours was fortunate and scored second in our county for the middle school college entrance exams..."

One of the turtles had used a small stone to gain leverage and flipped right-side up. The peasant noticed the escape but didn't move. Gong walked away from the two men following the turtle as it slowly walked across the courtyard back toward the hospital waiting area.

"Hunan University," he continued. "Now requires about five-hundred each semester as tuition."

"How much for the turtle?"

"Hundred Yuan."

"You said earlier you had about a dozen. I'll give you fifty."

"How many do you want?"

"Two."

"You have got a deal."

The peasant pulled a thin piece of nylon rope from his sack about a meter long and tied one end around the shell of the one in between them. Giving the other end to Dr. Hong, without a word, he walked over to the one that had escaped with Gong, picked it up and returned to Dr. Hong. Retaking the open end, he secured the second one.

"By just taking the center of the string, it is easy to carry both turtles." The peasant exemplified. Dr. Hong handed him a hundred Yuan note to complete the transaction. The peasant tied the top of his bag, slowly put it over his back and shuffled off.

Gong during the bargaining had checked in the waiting room on the Americans and with the Doctors behind the locked door for the results. Having not yet completed the analysis of the data, he returned to the courtyard and offered Hong another cigarette.

"How much did you get them for?"

"I bought the two for a hundred."

"Good deal. In Nanjing, I guess they would be about twice that cost."

"Yes, I figured we could give the doctor who conducted the ultrasound one. You never know if Beijing will allow us to work in Hunan again."

"It' going to be difficult to cook the other in our hotel room." Gong chided.

Dr. Hong used his left foot to further rub the cigarette but into courtyard ground. "You know there are so many reasons to leave this country and start a new life for my family in Canada. A beautiful house, a car, clean air."

"Think of the fishing." Gong added.

"A new start from all this political uncertainty, guaranteed higher education for my boy, maybe even more children. But, when I look at the American woman sitting in there crying, I think of how pathetic they are."

"How so?"

"You saw her dossier. She's been married four times, has never had any children and now after giving her the pick of the litter only after one day she fears for the baby's life. The orphan has been left to die yet only has been kept alive because Americans like her will pay good money. They are both unwanted and left to wither. Look at the peasant. He has nearly nothing of what the American has except maybe one thing."

"A good eye for turtles?" Gong questioned.

"Sacrifice. All of North America is based on a people who ran away from the problems of there homeland to start a new life. They didn't sacrifice for their children. I'm not talking about he government. I'm talking about Chinese. How can I stop sacrificing when so many have sacrificed for me? Sacrificing is what being Chinese is all about. The Americans know nothing about sacrifice and honor and someone's word. They trust no one and run away when things get difficult. Our

parents lived with our problems and believe that the family is more important than the individual."

"Yes, Chairman Mao, go on." Gong fueled.

"The only reason Mao tried something as far fetched as communism is because he knew family was the Chinese's strongest trait. He knew the people were able to endure hardship for the collective people. How can he be blamed for attempting to build a nation on such an honorable characteristic?"

"Twenty years later, your job exists because of his mistakes."

"That's true but the opportunity for me exists because of the sacrifices of my family. If I move to Canada, that all ends. My son will be Canadian. He'll go to college, marry some American or Canadian for love, get divorced., remarry someone half his age and then join his new wife in an effort to adopt internationally. He won't take care of me when I grow old and won't spend enough time with the child from his second marriage to instill any pride in his Chineseness. The chain of sacrifice ends with me.