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English Translation #1

Li Zheng of Longxi was a young man of extraordinary talented and intelligent. In the final years of the Tenpo era, at a young age, passed the insanely rigorous official examination. He was appointed to Magistrate responsible for the Jiangnan region south of the Yangtze River. Yet by nature, he was stubborn, self-reliant, and unyielding. He was not content being a low ranking official. Not long after, he retired from the government position and returned to his native Guolue, withdrawing from the world to live in seclusion, completely devoting himself to poetry. Rather than being a lowly official kneeling before a vulgar higher official, he would rather leave his name behind as a true poet that could remain a hundred years after his death. But literary fame is not easily won, and each passing day life grew more meager. At last, Li Zheng's. patience began to crumble. Around this time, his appearance became harsh and emaciated, his body grew thin, his flesh wasted away, his bones jutted sharply beneath his skin. Only his eyes still burned with a piercing light. The once sparkling, handsome, round-cheeked youth who had triumphed in the insanely rigorous official examination was nowhere to be seen. Several years later, unable to endure poverty, he decided for the sake of food and clothing for his wife and children, he once again headed eastward and became a local government official. This decision was also partly because of his despair over his poetic work.

English Translation #2

By this time, his former companions had already risen to the higher official ranks. It is easy to imagine how deeply it must have wounded the pride of the once-gifted Li Zheng to now have to obey orders from the very people that he had once dismissed as dull and beneath his notice. He no longer found joy in the world, and the savage spirit that dwelled within

grew restless, defying all restraint. A year later, while on official duty and lodging at an inn near a river, his mind succumbed at last to madness. One night, suddenly, his face grew deathly pale. He sprang from his bed, shouting strange, incomprehensible words, he leaped down the stairs, and vanished into the darkness. He never came back, and a thorough search of the surrounding mountains and fields yielded no clues about his whereabouts. No one knows what happened to Li Zheng after that. The following year the imperial censor Yuan Can from Chen County had imperial commands to travel to Lingnan and stopped at Shangyu on the way. The next morning, as he was about to depart while it was still dark, the station attendant told him that there was a man-eating tiger that haunts the road ahead, and no traveler may pass until broad daylight.

English Translation #3

It is still early in the morning, so it would be best to wait for a little said the station attendant. However, Yuan Can, trusting in the large number of his retinue, ignored the station attendant's words and set out on his travel. Guided by the waning moon's light, as they were making their way through the grassy forest, a ferocious tiger leapt out from the thicket. The tiger seemed ready to attack Yuan Can, but then suddenly he turned and hid in the thicket once more. From within the thicket, a human voice was heard muttering repeatedly, "That was close". That voice was one he had heard before. Despite the terror that held him fast, he instantly remembered who spoke, and cried out in a loud voice. "Is that not the voice of Li Zheng, my very friend?" he called out. Yuan Can passed the official examination in the same year as Li Zheng, and Li Zheng, who had very few friends, he was his closest companion. This was, perchance, because the gentle nature of Yuan Can did not clash with the austere nature of Li Zheng. From within the thicket, there was no reply for a while. From time to time, only a faint cry, like the sound of one weeping in secret, could be heard.

English Translation #4

After a while, a quiet voice answered. "It is true, I am Li Zheng from Longxi. Yuan Can, forgetting his fear, got off his horse, approached the thicket, and reminisced about the many years since they last met. He then asked why Li Zheng would not step out of the thicket. Li Zheng's voice replies, "I am no longer as I once was". How could I possibly show my wretched form before an old friend? And besides, if I were to reveal myself, it is bound to fill your heart with fear and abhorrence. However, by chance, I have encountered an old friend and now feel such nostalgia that I forget all sense of shame. Please, for but a little while, do not turn away from my present ugly form, but speak with me as the one who was once your friend Li Zheng. Looking back, it seemed strange, but at that moment, Yuan Can accepted the supernatural mystery with perfect ease, not questioning it at all. He ordered his men to halt the procession, then stood beside the thicket, speaking with the voice that could not be seen. They exchanged news of the capital, of former friends, and of Yuan Can's present standing with Li Zheng offering his words of congratulations. After speaking of all these things in a familiar manner of friends one close in youth, Yuan Can inquired how Li Zheng had come to be as he now was. The voice in the grass spoke as follows:

English Translation #5

About one year ago, when I was traveling and spent the night by the Ru River, after falling asleep, I suddenly woke up to hear a voice calling my name. Responding to the voice, I stepped out into the night, from the darkness it continued to call to me. Without realizing it, I ran after the voice. Lost in a trance, I ran on, and before I knew it the path had led me into the forest, and I found myself grasping the ground with both hands as I ran. I felt power overflowing through every limb, and with ease I leapt over the rocks as I ran. Before I realized it, hair seemed to be growing on my hands and along my arms. As daylight began to come, I looked at my reflection in the mountain stream and found that I had become a tiger. At first, I refused to believe my eyes. Then I thought this must be a dream, because I had seen dreams before where I knew, even within this dream, it was a dream. When at last I was forced to see that it was not a dream, I was stunned, lost in a daze. Then I was afraid. I was deeply terrified, thinking truly, anything could happen. But why has such a thing happened? I had no idea. We understand nothing at all. Without knowing the cause, we

meekly take what is imposed upon us, and without understanding, we continue to live, such is the fate of all living creatures. Immediately, I thought of death. Yet at that very moment, a lone bunny darted swiftly before my eyes, the humanity within me instantly vanished. When the humanity within me awoke once more, my mouth was covered in the bunny's blood, and its fur scattered all around me.

English Translation #6

This was my first experience as a tiger. I cannot bring myself to even talk about the deeds that I have committed since that time. However, for several hours each day, my human heart returns to me. At such times, I am as I once was, capable of human speech, endure complex thoughts, and recite passages from classic writings. And it is in those hours when my human heart returns and I behold the savage deeds I have done as a tiger and reflect upon my fate, that I am filled with the most extreme sorrow, terror and anger. Yet even those few hours in which I return to my human self have grown shorter as the days go by. Until now, I had wondered how I ever came to be a tiger. But the other day, I suddenly realized that I was not pondering instead how I had ever once been a man. This is terrifying. Before long, the human heart within me will be completely buried and lost within the habits of a beast. Just as the ancient foundations of a palace are, gradually buried into the earth. Then, in the end, I shall forget my past entirely, and roam around as a wild tiger. Even if I were to meet you on the road, as now, I would no longer know you as an old friend and would tear and devour you without the slightest remorse. After all, whether beast or man, we must have once been something else. At first, we remember it, but gradually forget until we come to believe that we have always been in our present form? No, that doesn't matter. When the human heart within me has completely vanished, perhaps then I shall be truly happy. And yet, the human heart within me finds this utterly terrifying. Ah, truly, how terrifying, how sorrowfully, how painfully it must feel! At the thought of losing all memory of having once being human. No one can understand this feeling. No one understands. Unless one has shared the same fate as I. By the way, that's right. Before my human self vanishes entirely, there is one request I wish to ask.

English Translation #7

Yuan Can and his retinue held their breath, listening in silence to the strange tale being told by the unseen voice in the thicket. The voice continued. Listen, my true ambition had always been to earn my name in this world as a poet. Yet, before my work was accomplished, I fell into this fate. The hundreds of poems I once composed, of course, have never seen the light of day. The whereabouts of my works are, by now, surely lost. However, among them, there are still dozens I can recall by heart. I wish that you would record and preserve them on my behalf. It is not that I wish to pretend to be a proper poet because of these. Whether the work be skillful or poor, I cannot say. But having ruined my livelihood and driven my mind to madness for its sake, I cannot die content unless at least some part of that which consumed me is carried on to those who come after. Yuan Can ordered his subordinates to take up their brushes and write down the words from the unseen voice in the thicket. Li Zheng's voice rang out clearly from within the thicket. Around thirty works of varying length, all distinguished by elegance and refined taste, each one revealing at first glace the extraordinary talent of the author. Yet, while filled with admiration, Yuan Can found himself vaguely thinking as follows: Indeed, there was no doubt that the author's talent belonged to the highest order. But as they stood, there seemed to be something missing, something lacking in some (very subtle way) for them to be truly a first-rate work. After finishing his recitation of the old poems, Li Zheng's voice shifted abruptly, speaking in a manner that seemed to be mocking himself.