

馮夢龍：東周列國志

*Chronicles of the Eastern Zhou Kingdoms: excerpts*

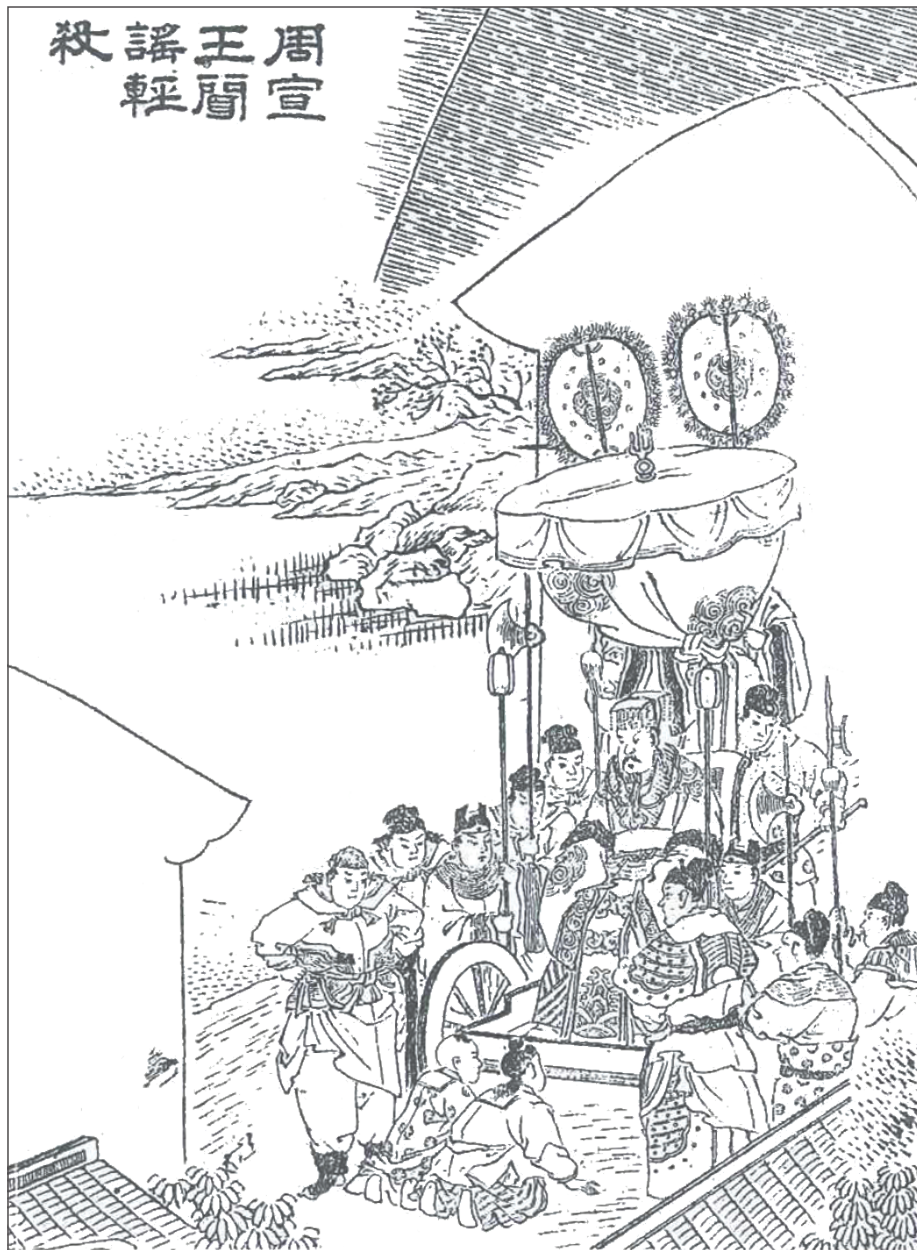
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Translated by Erik Honobe



There is a verse that goes:

For virtue, think of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors;  
For merit and fame, think of the dynasties of Xia, Shang, and Zhou;  
For heroes, think of the Five Overlords,  
Thriving in the era of Spring and Autumn.  
Rise and fall, won then lost,  
Mere moments can fortune be held!  
For a few lines of names on a historian's bamboo scrolls,  
Countless desolate graves lie at the foot of Mount Mang.  
As fields and lands were passed on throughout the ages,  
Fierce indeed were the fights of tigers and dragons.



King Xuan Has Innocents Executed over a Nursery Rhyme

## 第一回 周宣王聞謠輕殺 杜大夫化厲鳴冤

### King Xuan Has Innocents Executed over a Nursery Rhyme Grand Master Du Bo Returns as a Ghost to Cry Injustice

#### Chapter One

Our story takes place in the Zhou dynasty. All had started with King Wu overthrowing King Jou.<sup>1</sup> King Wu then became the new Son of Heaven and founder of the Zhou dynasty. His successors, King Cheng and King Kang, both protected the legacy. There were also virtuous and wise officials such as the Duke of Zhou, Duke Shao, Duke Bi, Chief Scribe Yi, and many others who helped administer the kingdom. It was a time of peace and literary enlightenment, an age when necessities were in abundance and subjects lived in prosperity. That is, until King Yi, the eighth king, disregarded ceremonies and rites with the feudal lords, who then started gaining power. Matters worsened with King Li, the ninth king, a brutal and ruthless tyrant who was eventually killed by his own people. This was the start of civil uprisings that would go on for many centuries. Then, thanks to the loyalty and efforts of the Duke of Zhou and Duke Shao, Crown Prince Jing, son of King Li, was instated as the new king, known as King Xuan. This new Son of Heaven was a man of virtue and reason. He employed in his court wise and loyal subjects such as General Fang Shu, Minister of Rites Shao Hu, Royal Secretary Yin Jifu, the Earl of Shen, and Grand Steward Zhong Shanfu, to name but a few. The kingdom was restored to its former glory of the days of Kings Wen, Wu, Cheng, and Kang. A poem attests to that:

Kings Yi and Li had driven the kingdom into disarray,  
But at last, came to the throne King Xuan,  
A man of wisdom who would rebuild the torn empire.  
If it weren't for this lord of restoration,  
Could the great Zhou empire have lasted for eight centuries?

Now, although King Xuan assiduously attended to the affairs of court, he could not compare with King Wu, who would diligently abide by the Vermilion Scriptures,<sup>2</sup> and who had the Scriptures' maxims engraved on the doors and

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<sup>1</sup> The last king of the Shang dynasty.

<sup>2</sup> Ancient cautionary writings on the fall of kingdoms.

windows of his palace to remind him of the lessons from history. And never would the reign of King Xuan ever see the levels of cultivation attained under King Cheng and King Kang. In their times, so far had shone the empire that foreign envoys came with legions of interpreters to offer exotic pheasants<sup>3</sup> to the Zhou court. In the thirty-ninth year of his reign [789 BCE], King Xuan personally led his troops against the rebelling Barbarians of the Jiang Clan. The royal forces were defeated at Qianmu and lost massive numbers of chariots and foot soldiers. The King was now planning a renewed attack but, fearing that his troops might not suffice in number, he decided to personally count in locals from the Taiyuan Highlands. These highlands were in what we now know as Guyuan County and bordered territories of the Barbarians and the Di Tribes. To count in the locals means to inspect local registries, survey local populations to estimate their sizes, inspect the supply of horses, chariots, grain supplies, and animal feed, all in preparation of enlisting the locals for battle. Grand Steward Zhong Shanfu remonstrated with the King but to no avail. On this, there is a poem by people of later times:

Why soil the blade of a fine sword  
By using it on dogs and swine?  
How precious pearls are ruined  
When they are thrown at sparrows!  
A king saw his prestige tarnished beyond repair  
When he wasted his talent personally counting in the local populace.

We return to our story. King Xuan was on his way back from the Taiyuan Highlands after counting in the locals. Not far from the Capital of Hao, the King had his man-drawn carriage hasten its pace and entered the town by night. Suddenly, he saw children in town gathering by the dozen, clapping hands and singing in unison. The King halted his carriage to listen. The song went:

Up goes the moon,  
Down goes the sun;  
Bows of mulberry wood, quivers of reed,  
And soon will the Zhou perish.

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<sup>3</sup> Exotic white pheasants were construed as a good omen and were offered to King Cheng of Zhou by tribes from distant southern lands as a token of respect.



King Xuan of Zhou

King Xuan loathed these words. He had his attendants pass on his order to arrest all the children for questioning. At once, the startled children scattered and only a small boy and an older one were caught. The two boys knelt by the royal carriage. King Xuan asked them, ‘Who made up this song?’

The small boy was too terrified to speak. It was the older one who answered, ‘None of us did. Three days ago, a little child dressed in red came to town and asked us to chant these four lines. Then, somehow the song began to spread and now, all children in the capital are singing it, not just us.’

‘And where is the child dressed in red now?’ asked the King.

‘No one knows. After teaching us that song, he just left.’

After a long pause, King Xuan angrily dismissed the two boys. He then immediately summoned the town commissioner and had him announce a decree, ‘Any child singing the song will be punished, and the parents and siblings of the child will suffer the same penalty.’

That night, the King returned to the palace without any further incidents.

Early the next morning, the grand nobles and high ministers gathered in the court and performed the customary ceremonies and bows. The King told his ministers of the previous night’s events and of the children’s song, and asked, ‘What could this signify?’

Shao Hu, the Minister of Rites, answered, ‘Mulberry trees are found in the mountains and their wood can make bows, hence bows of mulberry wood. Reed is a long dry weed, which can be woven to make quivers, and hence quivers of reed. In my humble opinion, this could mean that our empire might see a catastrophe of bows and arrows.’

Grand Steward Zhong Shanfu then addressed the King, ‘Bows and arrows are the weapons of war. Sire, you have counted in the people in the Taiyuan Highlands as you are planning to launch a punitive campaign against the Barbarian Curs.’

Yet, if we do not withdraw our troops, our kingdom will meet its demise!

King Xuan did not reply but nodded in acquiescence. He then asked, ‘That song is said to have come from a child dressed in red. Who could that child be?’

Grand Scribe Bo Yangfu then addressed the King, ‘When groundless stories are told in busy streets, they become folk tales. But when Heaven wants to warn a ruler, it orders the Shimmering Planet [Mars] to take the shape of a child, create a folk tale and have children learn it as a nursery rhyme. Warnings of this sort may predict the fortunes of one person, or the rise and fall of an entire kingdom. The Shimmering Planet is the planet of fire, hence the colour red. This nursery rhyme speaking of the Kingdom’s demise is a warning from Heaven to Your Majesty.’

‘In that case,’ said King Xuan, ‘I will forgive the Jiang Barbarians for their offences, and disband the troops in the Taiyuan Highlands. Further, I will order to burn all the bows and arrows stored at the arsenals, and I will forbid the making or selling of them in our kingdom. Will the calamity then not come to pass?’

‘Sire,’ replied the Grand Scribe, ‘I have observed the constellations and they have aligned to produce a prophecy, which seems to point to events within this royal house and not of bows and arrows from the outside. It says that in generations to come a court lady will bring calamities to our kingdom. Now, the nursery rhyme tells of the moon rising and the sun going down. The sun represents the ruler and the moon the element of *yin*. The sun goes down and the moon rises. The *yin* overtakes the *yang*. This clearly means that a court lady will meddle in the affairs of court.’

‘I have,’ replied the King, ‘entrusted Queen Jiang to oversee matters in the Six Palaces.<sup>4</sup> She is both virtuous and wise. All ladies who come to court are chosen by her, so where could a female calamity possibly come from?’

‘The rhyme says “will rise” and “will fall”, and does not speak of the present,’ replied the Scribe, ‘and “will” only means that it should happen but is not definite. Sire, you can follow virtue to keep off evil and the ominous will naturally make way for the auspicious. There is no need to burn or ban bows and arrows.’

King Xuan listened to the Scribe but did not fully credit him. Discontented, he adjourned the audience and went back to the Inner Quarters. Queen Jiang greeted the King as he entered. After taking a seat, the King promptly shared with the Queen all the details of his audience with his ministers.

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<sup>4</sup> The living quarters of the Queen and the court ladies.

‘Your Majesty,’ said the Queen, ‘I was just about to tell you of a bizarre incident that occurred in the Inner Quarters.’

‘What happened?’ asked the King.

Queen Jiang addressed him, ‘There is a court lady who used to serve under Your Majesty’s late father, and she is over fifty years old. She has carried a baby from the time of the previous reign for more than forty years and last night, finally gave birth to a girl.’

Very alarmed, the King asked, ‘And where is this girl now?’

‘I felt that the infant was a creature of ill omen, so I had a servant wrap her in a straw mat and throw her in the Qingshui River, about twenty *li* from here.’

King Xuan immediately summoned the court lady to the palace, and asked her how she had become pregnant. The court lady kneeled and answered, ‘I, your humble servant, heard an ancient account from the years of King Jie of the Xia dynasty. As it is told, there were two divine beings in the City of Bao who took the shape of two dragons and descended to the royal palace. Saliva dribbling from their mouths, the dragons suddenly spoke to King Jie in a human voice, “We are the two lords of the City of Bao.” Terrified, King Jie wished to have the dragons killed and he asked his Grand Scribe for divinatory readings and found that to do so would be inauspicious. King Jie then wished to have the dragons chased away, but again the readings came out inauspicious.

‘The Scribe then addressed the King, “Divine beings descending can only be auspicious for Your Majesty. Sire, why not ask for some of their saliva to keep? As the very essence of a dragon’s energy lies in its saliva, to preserve it will surely bring blessings to Your Majesty.”

‘King Jie asked again for divinatory readings and, this time, the readings came out as highly auspicious. The King laid out silk for sacrifice before the dragons and collected the saliva on a gold platter, which he then placed inside a vermilion casket. Suddenly, strong winds blew, a heavy rain fell, and away flew the dragons. And King Jie had the casket stored in the palace storehouse.

‘For six hundred and forty-four years under all twenty-eight kings of Shang, and almost another three hundred years under our kings of Zhou, none had ventured to open that casket until near the end of our late King Li’s reign, that is. At that time, faint rays of light had started emanating from the casket. The chief attendant of the palace storehouse reported this to King Li, who asked curiously: “What lies inside this casket?”

‘The attendant submitted the relevant registry, and in it was a detailed record of how the dragons’ saliva had come to be stored in the vermilion casket. At that, King Li ordered it opened to see what was within, and a servant opened and presented the gold platter to him. The King reached for the platter, but his hands slipped, and the platter fell to the ground.

‘All of the saliva was spilled and it trickled down to the courtyard. Then, it suddenly turned into a tiny lizard which started circling the courtyard. When the court attendants chased it, the lizard went straight into the main chamber and vanished.

‘At the time, I was only twelve years old. Inadvertently, I stepped on some tracks the lizard had made on the floor, and I sensed something happening inside me. After that day, my belly started growing, just as if I was pregnant. King Li chastised me for being pregnant with no husband, and I have been confined in secluded quarters for the past forty years. Last night, I felt pains in my belly, and I suddenly gave birth to a girl.

‘The palace chamberlain dared not conceal this and informed Her Majesty. Her Majesty said that such a freak cannot be kept and had a servant take it away and throw it into some ditch. Your servant begs forgiveness, as truly worth ten thousand deaths is the sin I have committed.’

‘Why should you be guilty for something that came from a previous reign?’ replied King Xuan to the court lady before dismissing her. Then, he promptly asked the palace chamberlain to go to the Qingshui River and find out what happened to the baby. Before long, the chamberlain returned to report, ‘The infant girl has floated away down the river.’ The King did not doubt these words.

In the morning audience next day, King Xuan told the Grand Scribe Bo Yangfu of the dragon saliva affair, and asked, ‘As the infant girl has now died in a ditch, could we have a reading to see if the daemonic spell has been eradicated?’

The Scribe performed the divination and presented the auguries to the King. The words were:

Sobbing and laughter, laughter and sobbing.  
A goat, devoured by spirits.  
A horse, chased by dogs.  
Beware, beware you must, bows of mulberry, quivers of reed!

As this made little sense to the King, the Scribe made his address, ‘Among the Twelve Earthly Branches, there is the Year of the Goat and the Year of the Horse.



And sobbing and laughter represent sorrow and rejoicing. This clearly points to ill fate in the coming years of the Horse and the Goat. Sire, I reckon that the daemonic spell has left the palace but is not yet eradicated.'

King Xuan listened to the Scribe and felt displeased. He immediately issued an order, 'Search all dwellings within and without the capital for the newborn infant girl. Anyone who fishes her out and brings her back, dead or alive, shall be rewarded 300 feet of embroidered silk and 300 feet of cloth. Anyone who takes in the girl shall be executed along with his or her family. If such a crime is discovered, the neighbours that made the denunciation shall receive the aforementioned reward.'

He entrusted Senior Grand Master Du Bo to oversee the affair. And as the ill omen mentioned 'bows and quivers', King Xuan ordered Junior Grand Master Zuo Ru to have the town commissioner inspect the streets and prohibit the making or selling of bows made of mulberry wood and quivers made of braided reed. Any violator was to be executed. The commissioner immediately gathered an entire section of underlings and read the edict throughout the capital while they made their inspection. Soon, the edict was known and strictly observed by all who lived in the capital, only those that lived in villages remained unaware.

On the second day of the inspection came a woman holding in her arms several quivers made precisely of braided reed, and a few paces behind was her husband carrying on his back a dozen of bows made of mulberry wood. The two had come from a far-off village and were heading toward the capital in great hurry so as to be in time to sell their goods at the midday market. Yet, before even reaching the city gates, they ran face on into the commissioner.

'Seize them!' shouted the commissioner, and his underlings immediately seized the peasant woman. Her husband, seeing that things were amiss ahead, threw his bows of mulberry on the ground and fled as fast as he could. The commissioner had the peasant woman chained and taken, together with the bows and quivers, to the quarters of Junior Grand Master Zuo Ru.

'The bows and quivers we seized were just those mentioned in the nursery rhyme,' thought the Junior Grand Master. 'What is more, the Grand Scribe had mentioned a woman causing calamities and now, we have arrested one. We can now return and report back to the King.'

And so, Junior Grand Master Zuo Ru decided not to mention the man who had escaped, and only informed the King of the woman, 'She was selling the prohibited goods and should be executed, in accordance with the edict.'

At that, the King ordered the woman beheaded and her bows and quivers burned in the marketplace, as a warning to other potential offenders. Nothing else need be said of this. There is a poem by people of later times:

Not averting the crisis by implementing virtuous policies,  
But blindly trusting a nursery rhyme and killing a woman.  
Instead of talking of restoring the empire,  
Why not try to correct more wrongs?  
Why did not his subjects  
Voice this frank advice?

Now for the other track of our story. We return to the man who wanted to sell bows of mulberry wood. He escaped in great haste and was wondering why the commissioner had arrested his wife, but what now mattered was to find out what had happened to her. He stayed about ten *li* from the capital for the night and the next morning, he heard someone say: 'Yesterday, at the north gate, a woman violated the edict that forbids the making and selling of mulberry bows and reed quivers, and she was taken and executed at once.' And so the man learned that his wife had died. He ran away to a wide deserted field and wept tears of sorrow. But he was happy that he himself had escaped disaster, and with confident steps he left.

After walking about ten *li*, he reached the Qingshui River, where he saw hundreds of birds flying and calling in the distance. He stepped closer and found a straw bundle floating on the river. The birds held the straw bundle with their beaks and brought it closer to the river bank, all the while calling loudly.

'How odd!' cried out the man. He chased the birds away, reached for the straw bundle and carried it back to the river bank. When he undid the bundle he heard a cry; why, it was an infant girl! The man thought, 'I wonder who abandoned this infant girl, but as birds rescued her from the waters, she must be under great auspices. If I take her and raise her as my own, great rewards will come when she grows up.'

So he undid his outer garment, wrapped it around the infant girl and carried her against his chest as he considered places of refuge. In the distance, he could see the City of Bao and decided to go to an acquaintance there for shelter. On the miraculous survival of this girl, the Long-Bearded Old Man wrote a short poem:

Staying in the womb for forty long years,  
And survived in the waters for three whole days.

Thus, to the world came an ominous creature who would ruin a whole country.  
Little good can royal edicts do against the will of Heaven!

Now that the woman selling bows and quivers had been executed, King Xuan believed that the ill omen of the nursery rhyme had been fulfilled. He felt some peace of mind and he no longer talked of dispatching troops from the Taiyuan Highlands. From then on, years went by without incident, until the forty-third year of his reign [785 BCE].

During the annual grand worship, King Xuan was staying at the Palace of Rites. The late-night water clock struck twice, and all souls were still. Suddenly, a young woman of stunning beauty appeared from the west; she came slowly toward the palace and entered. Baffled to see this woman violating the rules of the annual worship, King Xuan loudly berated her, quickly calling his aides to have her seized, but no one answered. Unfazed, the woman entered the Ancestral Hall and there, she let out three loud laughs, followed by three sobs. Then, in a calm and composed manner, she walked to the Seven Temples where the first seven kings of the Zhou dynasty were worshipped.<sup>5</sup> There she took all seven ancestral tablets from the temples, tied them into a bundle with a string and left for the east. The King rose to follow her himself, and suddenly woke up. It had been a dream! Still feeling dazed by this dream, the King could barely enter the temple and perform the worship ceremonies. After completing the Nine Offerings,<sup>6</sup> he returned to the Palace of Rites and changed his vestments. He then asked his aides to discreetly summon Grand Scribe Bo Yangfu, and he told the Scribe everything he had seen in his dream.

The Scribe made his address, ‘Sire, how can you have forgotten the words of the nursery rhyme three years ago? I recall saying “a woman will bring calamities” and “the daemonic spell has yet to be eradicated”, and there were also premonitions about sobbing and laughing. All this clearly matches the dream you just had.’

‘Was the execution of the woman not sufficient to eradicate the spell of “mulberry bows and reed quivers”?’

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<sup>5</sup> The Seven Temples consisted of a central temple, three smaller temples on the left, and three more on the right. The central temple was for worshipping the founding king of the Zhou dynasty and the other temples for his six successors.

<sup>6</sup> A ritual of worship consisting in burning incense nine times for the ancestral Zhou kings.

‘The ways of Heaven,’ replied the Scribe, ‘are obscure and remote, and will only manifest themselves when the right time comes. How can fate be avoided by executing a mere peasant woman?’

At these words, King Xuan heaved a deep sigh and fell silent. Then, he suddenly remembered that, three years before, he had ordered Senior Grand Master Du Bo to inspect the town in search of the ominous infant girl, with no result. After meat offerings were made, he returned to court. The hundred ministers bowed in thanks, and he asked Du Bo, ‘Why is there still no report on the ominous infant girl after all this time?’

The Senior Grand Master then made his address, ‘Sire, our search for the infant girl yielded no trace that we could follow. As the bewitched woman was found guilty, and the nursery rhyme fulfilled, I honestly feared that a relentless search might cause alarm in our kingdom, and so I halted the search.’

Furious, King Xuan said, ‘If this were the case, why did you not make that clear by reporting it to me? Clearly, you have neglected my orders and shown rash insubordination. I have no use for such a disloyal subject!’ He then barked orders to the palace guards, ‘Take him out to the palace gate and behead him, as an example to the masses!’

The faces of the hundred court officials blanched with fear. Just then, from the rows of civil officials, a minister stepped forward. He quickly pulled back Du Bo, and said repeatedly, ‘Stop, please! Stop!’

King Xuan looked and recognized Junior Grand Master Zuo Ru, a close friend of Du Bo’s. In fact, it was Du Bo who had named Zuo Ru to be employed with him at court.

Zuo Ru bowed and made his address, ‘I was once told that Emperor Yao saw nine years of flood, yet unharmed was his throne, and that King Tang saw seven years of drought, yet intact was his reign. We may have to accept oddities from Heaven, but should we fully believe human bewitching? Sire, if you execute Senior Grand Master Du Bo, I fear that people may spread superstitious heresies, and if our barbarian neighbours learn about it, they will grow scornful and defy us. I thus beg you to forgive him.’

‘You are opposing my orders,’ said King Xuan, ‘for the sake of your friend. How dare you value your friend above your king!’

Zuo Ru replied, ‘If my king is in the right and my friend at fault, I will turn against my friend and follow my king. But if it is my friend who is in the right

and my king who is at fault, then I must oppose my king and follow my friend. Du Bo has committed no offense punishable by death. Your Majesty, if you execute him, then the world will deem you unjust. And if I, your subject, do not admonish against this, then the world will deem me disloyal. Sire, if you must execute Du Bo, then I ask to join him in death.'

King Xuan's anger had not subsided. He said, 'I shall do away with Du Bo just as I would do away with weeds and grass. Why waste any more breath on this?' Then, he shouted orders, 'Behead Du Bo at once!'

The guards took Du Bo outside the palace gate and decapitated him. Zuo Ru returned to his lodgings, where he took his own life. The Long-Bearded Old Man had words of praise:

A man of wisdom was Zuo Ru,  
For righteously admonishing an angered dragon.  
A friend in the right must be followed,  
Just as a king in the wrong must be opposed.  
He was appointed at court by a good friend,  
And so he laid down his life in the name of true friendship.  
May the virtue of Zuo Ru be honoured  
For a thousand years and more.

Du Bo's son, Xishu, fled to the state of Jin, where he became a minister of justice, and was conferred the title of Shi Master. His descendants were thus called the clan of Shi. They were granted the fiefdom of Fan, hence also known as the clan of Fan. People of later times lamented the fate of the loyal Du Bo and therefore built a shrine in his honour on the Hill of Du, which was named after him. This shrine, also known as the Shrine of the Commander of the Right, still stands today. But all this is another story.

We return to our story of King Xuan who, on the next day, learnt that Zuo Ru had taken his own life. He felt remorseful for having executed Du Bo, and dejectedly returned to his palace. That night he lay in bed, unable to find sleep. Soon, he fell into a state of absent-mindedness and rambled in his speech. He became forgetful of daily affairs and stopped attending audiences at court. Queen Jiang knew of his indisposition and no longer remonstrated with him. By the seventh lunar month in the autumn of the forty-sixth year of his reign [782 BCE], the King's indisposition had waned. To lift his spirits, he decided to go on a hunting expedition in the

outskirts of the capital and thus ordered the Minister of Works to prepare the royal carriage, the Minister of War to take command of the foot soldiers and chariots, and Grand Scribe Bo Yangfu to hold a divination to pick an auspicious day.

The awaited day came. King Xuan rode in a royal carriage pulled by six mounted escorts. At his side were Royal Secretary Yin Jifu and Minister of Rites Shao Hu. Royal flags and banners paraded in a forest of armour and spears, as the massive procession made its way toward the eastern outskirts of the capital. There was an abundance of wide plains and empty fields, and these had always been the designated territories for royal hunting expeditions. King Xuan, who had not been on a royal outing in a long time, felt a pleasant sense of exhilaration.

He passed an order to build the hunting camps and gave instructions to the soldiers, 'First, no one is to step on the grain crops in these fields. Second, no one shall burn or otherwise damage the forest trees. Third, no one shall trespass on nearby citizens' dwellings or cause disturbances. Hunters are to hand over all the game they catch regardless of size or number, and shall be rewarded accordingly. Any hunter who attempts to conceal the game he catches shall be severely punished.'

As soon as the starting signal was given, all marched boldly to the hunting field and rushed out vying to catch the most game. Soldiers on chariots were performing complex manoeuvres in a show of complete mastery of their arsenal, while archers were boastfully bending their bows and flaunting their archery skills from all sides. This fierce tumult drove the hunting falcons and dogs wild, and sent the foxes and rabbits scurrying away in fear in all directions. Where bowstrings rang, flesh and blood spattered; where arrows flew, hair and feathers scattered. How lively this hunting scene was! King Xuan felt ecstatic.

At sunset, order was given for the hunting enclosure to be disbanded; soldiers tied up their catch of beasts and birds and the procession triumphantly headed back to the capital. They had not gone three or four *li* on the way back when King Xuan dozed off inside the royal carriage. Suddenly, a small chariot appeared in the distance charging straight toward the royal carriage. Standing on the moving chariot were two men, each shouldering a crimson bow and holding a scarlet arrow. As they drew closer, the two men faced King Xuan and called out, 'Your Majesty, have you been well since we last parted?'

King Xuan fixed his gaze and looked, one was Senior Grand Master Du Bo and the other Junior Grand Master Zuo Ru. He was very much startled and after he



Grand Master Du Bo Returns as a Ghost to Cry Injustice

rubbed his eyes, the chariot and the two men had vanished. The King inquired, and his nearby attendants all claimed not to have seen a thing. Just as he was puzzling this over, the two officers reappeared on their chariot heading toward the royal carriage and remaining in front of it. This infuriated the King.

He yelled at them, 'How dare you attack the royal carriage, you sinful devils!'

He unsheathed the Mighty Sword of Tai'e, and brandished it in the air. But Du Bo and Zuo Ru simply shouted abuse at the King, their voices in unison, 'Unprincipled, dimwitted ruler! Your reign is devoid of virtue and you have forgotten about the innocents you have killed. Here is your doom; we have come today to seek revenge. Return our lives to us!'

Before the last syllable had died away, they drew their crimson bows, loaded the scarlet arrows, and shot them straight at the King's chest. The King let out a scream and collapsed onto the royal carriage. So startled were his two ministers that the legs of the Royal Secretary became numb and the eyelids of the Minister of Rites began to twitch. With the help of the aides, they brought the King back to consciousness with a concoction of ginger. But the King cried out incessantly of pain in the chest. The aides rushed the royal carriage back to the capital and hurriedly carried the King into the palace. The soldiers all hastily dispersed without collecting their hunting rewards. It was truly a disheartening end for such a victorious day. On this, the Long-Bearded Old Man had a poem:

Like divine spirits had seemed the two officers,  
With their scarlet arrows and crimson bows,  
Into an army of a thousand their chariot flew.  
Not even a king can escape retribution, if innocents he had slain.  
Those without any privilege had better not try their luck!

Will King Xuan live through this? We shall know in the next chapter.