

The Dwarf Hunters

By P'ou Song-lin

The heavy summer in the South is particularly hard to bear for those who are ill. The damp heat keeps them awake, and thousands of insects trouble their rest.

Wang Little-third-one, stretched on his bed made of bamboo laths, where a low fever kept him, complained of it to all those who came to see him, especially to his friend the magician officiating priest of the little temple situated in the neighbouring crossway.

The magician knew something of medicine; he prescribed a calming potion and retired.

When Little-third-one had drunk the potion, his fever fell and he was able to enjoy a little sleep. He was awakened by a slight noise; night had come on; the room was lighted by the full moon, which threw a bright gleam by the open door.

All the insects were moving and flying hither and thither; white ants who gnaw wood, bad-smelling bugs, enormous cockroaches, mosquitoes, innumerable and various flies.

As Little-third-one was looking, his attention was drawn by a movement on the threshold: a small man, not bigger than a thumb, advanced with precautious steps; in his hand he held a bow; a sword was hanging at his side.

Little-third-one, on looking closer, saw two dogs as big as shirt-buttons running before the man with the bow; they suddenly stopped: the archer approached, held out his weapon, and discharged the arrow. A cockroach who was crawling before the dogs made a bound, fell on its back, moved again, then remained motionless; the arrow had run through it.

Behind the first huntsman others had come; some were on horseback, armed with swords; some on foot.

From that time it was a pursuit without intermission; hundreds of insects were shot. At first the mosquitoes escaped; but as they cannot fly for long, every time that one remained still it was transpierced by the huntsmen.

Soon nothing was left of all the insects who broke the silence with their buzzing, their gnashing of teeth, or their falling.

A horseman then was seen galloping over the room, looking from right to left. He then gave the signal; all the huntsmen called their dogs, went towards the door, and disappeared.

Little-third-one had not moved, in order not to disturb the hunt. At last he peacefully went to sleep, henceforth sure of not being awakened by a sting or a bite. He awoke late the next day almost cured.

When his friend the magician came to see him, he told him his experience: the other smiled. Wang understood that the mysterious hunters came from the little temple.