

# The Lost Brother

By P'u Sung-ling

In Honan there lived a man named Chang, who originally belonged to Shantung. His wife had been seized and carried off by the soldiery during the period when Ching Nan's troops were overrunning the latter province; and as he was frequently in Honan on business, he finally settled there and married a Honan wife, by whom he had a son named Na. By-and-by this wife died, and he took another, who bore him a son named Ch'êng. The last-mentioned lady was from the Niu family, and a very malicious woman. So jealous was she of Na, that she treated him like a slave or a beast of the field, giving him only the coarsest food, and making him cut a large bundle of wood every day, in default of which she would beat and abuse him in a most shameful manner. On the other hand, she secretly reserved all the tit-bits for Ch'êng, and also sent him to school. As Ch'êng grew up, and began to understand the meaning of filial piety and fraternal love, he could not bear to see this treatment of his elder brother, and spoke privately to his mother about it; but she would pay no heed to what he said.

One day, when Na was on the hills performing his task, a violent storm came on, and he took shelter under a cliff. However, by the time it was over the sun had set, and he began to feel very hungry. So, shouldering his bundle, he wended his way home, where his stepmother, displeased with the small quantity of wood he had brought, refused to give him anything to eat. Quite overcome with hunger, Na went in and lay down; and when Ch'êng came back from school, and saw the state he was in, he asked him if he was ill. Na replied that he was only hungry, and then told his brother the whole story; whereupon Ch'êng coloured up and went away, returning shortly with some cakes, which he offered to Na.

"Where did you get them?" asked the latter. "Oh," replied Ch'êng, "I stole some flour and got a neighbour's wife to make them for me. Eat away, and don't talk." Na ate them up; but begged his brother not to do this again, as he might get himself into trouble. "I sha'n't die," added he, "if I only get one meal a day." "You are not strong," rejoined Ch'êng, "and shouldn't cut so much wood as you do."

Next day, after breakfast, Ch'êng slipped away to the hills, and arrived at the place where Na was occupied with his usual task, to the great astonishment of the latter, who inquired what he was going to do. "To help you cut wood," replied Ch'êng. "And who sent you?" asked his brother. "No one," said he; "I came of my own accord." "Ah," cried Na, "you can't do this work; and even if you can you must not. Run along home again." Ch'êng, however, remained, aiding his brother with his hands and feet alone, but declaring that on the morrow he would bring an axe. Na tried to stop him, and found that he had already hurt his finger and worn his shoes into holes; so he began to cry, and said, "If you don't go home directly, I'll kill myself with my axe." Ch'êng then went away, his brother seeing him halfway home, and going back to finish his work by himself. He also called in the evening at Ch'êng's school, and told the master his brother was a delicate boy, and should not be allowed to go on the hills, where, he said, there were fierce tigers and wolves. The master replied that he didn't know where Ch'êng had been all the morning, but that he had caned him for playing truant. Na further pointed out to Ch'êng that by not doing as he had told him, he had let himself in for a beating. Ch'êng laughed, and said he hadn't been beaten; and the very next day off he went again, and this time with a hatchet. "I told you not to come," cried Na, much alarmed; "why have you done so?" Ch'êng made no reply, but

set to work chopping wood with such energy that the perspiration poured down his face and when he had cut about a bundle he went away without saying a word. The master caned him again, and then Ch'êng told him how the matter stood, at which the former became full of admiration for his pupil's kind behaviour, and no longer prevented him from going. His brother, however, frequently urged him not to come, though without the slightest success; and one day, when they went with a number of others to cut wood, a tiger rushed down from the hills upon them. The wood-cutters hid themselves, in the greatest consternation; and the tiger, seizing Ch'êng, ran off with him in his mouth. Ch'êng's weight caused the tiger to move slowly; and Na, rushing after them, hacked away at the tiger's flanks with his axe. The pain only made the tiger hurry off, and in a few minutes they were out of sight. Overwhelmed with grief, Na went back to his comrades, who tried to soothe him; but he said, "My brother was no ordinary brother, and, besides, he died for me; why, then, should I live?" Here, seizing his hatchet, he made a great chop at his own neck, upon which his companions prevented him from doing himself any more mischief. The wound, however, was over an inch deep, and blood was flowing so copiously that Na became faint, and seemed at the point of death. They then tore up their clothes, and, after having bandaged his neck, proceeded to carry him home. His stepmother cried bitterly, and cursed him, saying, "You have killed my son, and now you go and cut your neck in this make-believe kind of way." "Don't be angry, mother," replied Na; "I will not live now that my brother is dead." He then threw himself on the bed; but the pain of his wound was so great he could not sleep, and day and night he sat leaning against the wall in tears. His father, fearing that he too would die, went every now and then and gave him a little nourishment; but his wife cursed him so for doing it, that at length Na refused all food, and in three days he died.

Now in the village where these events took place there was a magician who was employed in certain devil-work among mortals,<sup>1</sup> and Na's ghost, happening to fall in with him, related the story of its previous sorrows, winding up by asking where his brother's ghost was. The magician said he didn't know, but turned round with Na and showed him the way to a city where they saw an official servant coming out of the city gates. The magician stopped him, and inquired if he could tell them anything about Ch'êng; whereupon the man drew out a list from a pouch at his side, and, after carefully examining it, replied that among the male and female criminals within there was no one of the name of Chang. The magician here suggested that the name might be on another list; but the man replied that he was in charge of that road, and surely ought to know. Na, however, was not satisfied, and persuaded the magician to enter the city, where they met many new and old devils walking about, among whom were some Na had formerly known in life. So he asked them if they could direct him to his brother; but none of them knew where he was; and suddenly there was a great commotion, the devils on all sides crying out, "P'u-sa<sup>2</sup> has come!" Then, looking up, Na beheld a most beautiful man descending from above, encircled by rays of glory, which shot forth above and below, lighting up all around him. "You are in luck's way, Sir," said the magician to Na; "only once in many thousand years does P'u-sa descend into hell and banish all suffering. He has come to-day." He then made Na kneel, and all the devils began with clasped hands to sing songs of praise to P'u-sa for his compassion in releasing them from their misery, shaking the very earth with the sound. P'u-sa himself seizing a willow-branch, sprinkled them all with holy water; and when this was done the clouds and glory melted away,

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<sup>1</sup> Ordinary devils being unable to stand for any length of time the light and life of the upper world, the souls of certain persons are often temporarily employed in this work by the authorities of Purgatory, their bodies remaining meanwhile in a trance or cataleptic fit.

<sup>2</sup> The Chinese corrupted form of Bodhisatva. Now widely employed to designate any deity of any kind.

and he vanished from their sight. Na, who had felt the holy water fall upon his neck, now became conscious that the axe-wound was no longer painful; and the magician then proceeded to lead him back, not quitting him until within sight of the village gate. In fact, Na had been in a trance for two days, and when he recovered he told them all that he had seen, asserting positively that Ch'ên; was not dead. His mother, however, looked upon the story as a makeup, and never ceased reviling him; and, as he had no means of proving his innocence, and his neck was now quite healed, he got up from the bed and said to his father, "I am going away to seek for my brother throughout the universe; if I do not find him, never expect to see me again, but I pray you regard me as dead." His father drew him aside and wept bitterly. However, he would not interfere with his son's design, and Na accordingly set off. Whenever he came to a large town or populous place he used to ask for news of Ch'êng; and by-and-by, when his money was all spent, he begged his way on foot. A year had passed away before he reached Nanking, and his clothes were all in tatters—as ragged as a quail's tail, when suddenly he met some ten or a dozen horsemen, and drew away to the roadside. Among them was a gentleman of about forty, who appeared to be a mandarin, with numerous lusty attendants and fiery steeds accompanying, him before and behind. One young man on a small palfrey, whom Na took to, be the mandarin's son, and at whom, of course, he did not venture to stare, eyed him closely for some time, and at length stopped his steed, and, jumping off, cried out, "Are you not my brother?" Na then raised his head, and found that Ch'êng stood before him. Grasping each other's hands, the brothers burst into tears, and at length Ch'êng said, "My brother, how is it you have strayed so far as this?" Na told him the circumstances, at which he was much affected; and Ch'êng's companions, jumping off their horses to see what was the matter, went off and informed the mandarin. The latter ordered one of them to give up his horse to Na, and thus they rode together back to the mandarin's house. Ch'êng then told his brother how the tiger had carried him away, and how he had been thrown down in the road, where he had passed a whole night; also how the mandarin, Mr. Chang, on his return from the capital, had seen him there, and, observing that he was no common-looking youth, had set to work and brought him round again. Also how he had said to Mr. Chang that his home was a great way off, and how Mr. Chang had taken him to his own home, and finally cured him of his wounds; when, having no son of his own, he had adopted him. And now, happening to be out with his father, he had caught sight of his brother. As he was speaking Mr. Chang walked in, and Na thanked him very heartily for all his kindness; Ch'êng, meanwhile, going into the inner apartments to get some clothes for his brother. Wine and food was placed on the table; and while they were chatting together the mandarin asked Na about the number of their family in Honan. "There is only my father," replied Na, "and he is a Shantung man who came to live in Honan." "Why, I am a Shantung man too," rejoined Mr. Chang; "what is the name of your father's native place?" "I have heard that it was in the Tung-ch'ang district," replied Na, "Then we are from the same place," cried the mandarin. "Why did your father go away to Honan?" "His first wife," said Na, "was carried off by soldiers, and my father lost everything he possessed; so, being in the habit of trading to Honan, he determined to settle down there for good." The mandarin then asked what his father's other name was, and when he heard, he sat some time staring at Na, and at length hurried away within. In a few moments out came an old lady, and when they had all bowed to her, she asked Na if he was Chang Ping-chih's grandson. On his replying in the affirmative, the old lady wept, and, turning to Mr. Chang, said, "These two are your younger brothers." And then she explained to Na and Ch'êng as follows:—"Three years after my marriage with your father, I was carried off to the north and made a slave<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Slavery, under a modified form, exists in China at the present day. All parents, having absolute power over their

in a mandarin's family. Six months afterwards your elder brother here was born, and in another six months the mandarin died. Your elder brother being his heir, he received this appointment, which he is now resigning. I have often thought of my native place, and have not unfrequently sent people to inquire about my husband, giving them the full particulars as to name and clan; but I could never hear anything of him. How should I know that he had gone to Honan?" Then, addressing Mr. Chang, she continued, "That was rather a mistake of yours, adopting your own brother." "He never told me anything about Shantung," replied Mr. Chang; "I suppose he was too young to remember the story; and I only looked at the difference between our ages." For he, the elder of the brothers, was forty-one; Ch'êng, the younger, being only sixteen; and Na, twenty years of age. Mr. Chang was very glad to get two young brothers; and when he heard the tale of their separation, proposed that they should all go back to their father. Mrs. Chang was afraid her husband would not care to receive her back again; but her eldest son said, "We will cast our lot together; all or none. How can there be a country where fathers are not valued?" They then sold their house and packed up, and were soon on the way to Honan. When they arrived, Ch'êng went in first to tell his father, whose third wife had died since Na left, and who now was a desolate old widower, left alone with only his own shadow. He was overjoyed to see Ch'êng again, and, looking fondly at his son, burst into a flood of tears. Ch'êng told him his mother and brothers were outside, and the old man was then perfectly transfixed with astonishment, unable either to laugh or to cry. Mr. Chang next appeared, followed by his mother; and the two old people wept in each other's arms, the late solitary widower hardly knowing what to make of the crowd of men and women-servants that suddenly filled his house. Here Ch'êng, not seeing his own mother, asked where she was; and when he heard she was dead, he fainted away, and did not come round for a good half-hour. Mr. Chang found the money for building a fine house, and engaged a tutor for his two brothers. Horses pranced in the stables, and servants chattered in the hall—it was quite a large establishment.

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children, are at liberty to sell them as servants or slaves to their wealthier neighbours. This is not an infrequent occurrence in times of distress, the children even going so far as to voluntarily sell themselves, and exposing themselves in some public thoroughfare, with a notice affixed to a kind of arrow on their backs, stating that they are for sale, and the amount required from the purchaser. This I have seen with my own eyes. The chief source, however, from which the supply of slaves is kept up is kidnapping. As to the condition of the slaves themselves, it is by no means an unhappy one. Their master has nominally the power of life and death over them, but no Chinaman would ever dream of availing himself of this dangerous prerogative. They are generally well fed, and fairly well clothed, being rarely beaten, for fear they should run away, and either be lost altogether or entail much expense to secure their capture. The girls do not have their feet compressed; hence they are infinitely more useful than small-footed women; and, on reaching a marriageable age, their masters are bound to provide them with husbands. They live on terms of easy familiarity with the whole household; and, ignorant of the meaning and value of liberty, seem quite contented with a lot which places them beyond the reach of hunger and cold. Slaves take the surnames of their masters, and the children of slaves are likewise slaves. Manumission is not uncommon; and Chinese history furnishes more than one example of a quondam slave attaining to the highest offices of State.