

The Ghost of Wan Li Road

by Kara Dalkey

One hot summer day, long ago in the village of Nanyang, three young men sat in the shade. They were discussing their fortune.

"I have very little money," said one. "I have not eaten in two days. My stomach is growling as loud as a dragon. I fear it will soon eat me from the inside out."

"That sounds painful, indeed," said the second. "What will you do?"

"I think," said the first, "that I will go to the forest. I will chop some wood to sell."

The third young man was named Sung Ting-Po. He was known to be very clever. He said, "That won't help you. It's summer. No one will buy wood for warmth. And the wood is very dry. It will turn to splinters as soon as your ax strikes it."

The first young man shrugged. He looked down at the dust between his feet.

"I am also very poor," said the second young man. "I have not bought new shoes in a year. Look. My toes and heels have worn through these."

"They look useless, indeed," said the first. "What will you do?"

"I will go to the lake and catch ducks for their feathers. I will then sell the feathers to the pillow maker."

But Sung Ting-Po said, "The lake is dry, my friend. And no ducks swim there now. You can't get feathers from empty mud."

The second young man sighed and stared at his hands.

The first said, "You are clever, Sung Ting-Po. What will you do to earn money? You are as poor as we are."

Sung Ting-Po skipped a stone along the dusty ground. "I think I will try my luck at the market in Wan. Perhaps I can find a merchant who needs a helper."

The other two stared at each other a moment. Then they looked at Sung Ting-Po. "Wan is very far away," said the first. "How will you get there?"

"I'll walk," said Sung Ting-Po. "I will leave this evening, when it is cool. I should reach Wan at daybreak. That is when the market opens."

"No, no!" said the other two. "You don't want to do that."

"Why not?" said Sung Ting-Po.

"That road," said the first, with fear in his voice, "is the Wan Li Road. It is guarded by a horrible ghost!"

Sung Ting-Po started to laugh.

"It's true!" said the second. "I have seen this ghost with my own eyes."

"Me too!" said the first.

"What did you do when you saw this ghost?" asked Sung Ting-Po.

"Need you ask?" said the second. "I ran home as fast as my legs could take me. I didn't want to be caught by that ghost."

"And you?" Sung Ting-Po asked the first.

"I got down on my knees. I begged the ghost not to hurt me. The ghost said he would spare my life this once. But I was never to travel the Wan Li Road again after dark or he would surely kill me."

"I see," said Sung Ting-Po with a grin. "Well, my friends, I am more afraid of starving than I am of a ghost. I don't care how horrible he looks. Your tales will not keep me from walking the Wan Li Road tonight." With that, Sung Ting-Po stood up. He dusted himself off and turned to go on his way.

"You should listen to us!" said the first.

"If you walk on that road, the only fortune you will gain is death," said the second. "We'll see," said Sung Ting-Po.

The setting moon glowed in the west, and the wind hissed through the dry grasses. Sung Ting-Po had been walking on the Wan Li Road for hours. But it had not been tiring. All he carried with him was a piece of rope in his pocket. Along the way he had seen nothing strange. The only sounds were

the hooting of the night birds and the soft *pad-pad* of Sung Ting-Po's bare feet on the dust of the road. But it was only an hour after midnight. He still had very far to go.

Then he noticed a strange mist close to the ground by the side of the road. The mist drifted into the middle of the road ahead of Sung Ting-Po. It then turned into the shape of a hideous old man. Sung Ting-Po knew that this must be the ghost. This creature stared at Sung Ting-Po with a hateful eye. It opened its mouth, preparing to speak.

But Sung Ting-Po beat him to it and spoke first. "Good morning!" he said to the ghost, smiling.

The ghost shut his mouth and frowned. Then he said, "Early morning it may be. But it is not good. Not for you, young man."

"Why is that?" said Sung Ting-Po.

"Because," said the ghost. "I am a *ghost!*"

"Well, that's really amazing!" said Sung Ting-Po. "I'm a ghost too."

"You are?" said the ghost. "You look rather solid and not like a mist."

"Uh . . . that's because . . . because . . . I'm a *new* ghost," said Sung Ting-Po. "I just died tonight. In fact, I ate some bad mushrooms for dinner, and they poisoned me. I am now on my way to the market in Wan. I want to find the merchant who sold the bad mushrooms to my mother."

"Well now, well now," said the ghost. "That sounds like the right thing to do. Yes, indeed. I would like to help you. Do you mind if I come along?"



"Not at all," said Sung Ting-Po.

They walked in silence together for a while. The ghost floated above the road. But Sung Ting-Po's feet kicked up little clouds of dust as he walked.

"Say there," said the ghost. "If you *are* a ghost, why do you still walk along on the ground? Why don't you float *above* it like me?"

"Ah," said Sung Ting-Po, "I am so new at being a ghost that I still walk with my feet upon the earth. I guess I'll get over it in time. After all, you did."

"Ah, hum, well, yes. Although I don't remember having to touch the ground with my feet after I died."

"Ah, you are a very fine ghost! There is much I could learn from you," said Sung Ting-Po.

"Indeed," said the ghost. "Indeed, there is! You know, Wan is farther than I remembered. The sun will be rising before long. We want to get there before the sun comes up. Ghosts should not be caught in the sunlight. Why don't we take turns carrying each other?"

"A good idea," said Sung Ting-Po.

First Sung Ting-Po carried the ghost. This was no **burden** for him, for the ghost was very light and airy. But then came the ghost's turn to carry Sung Ting-Po.

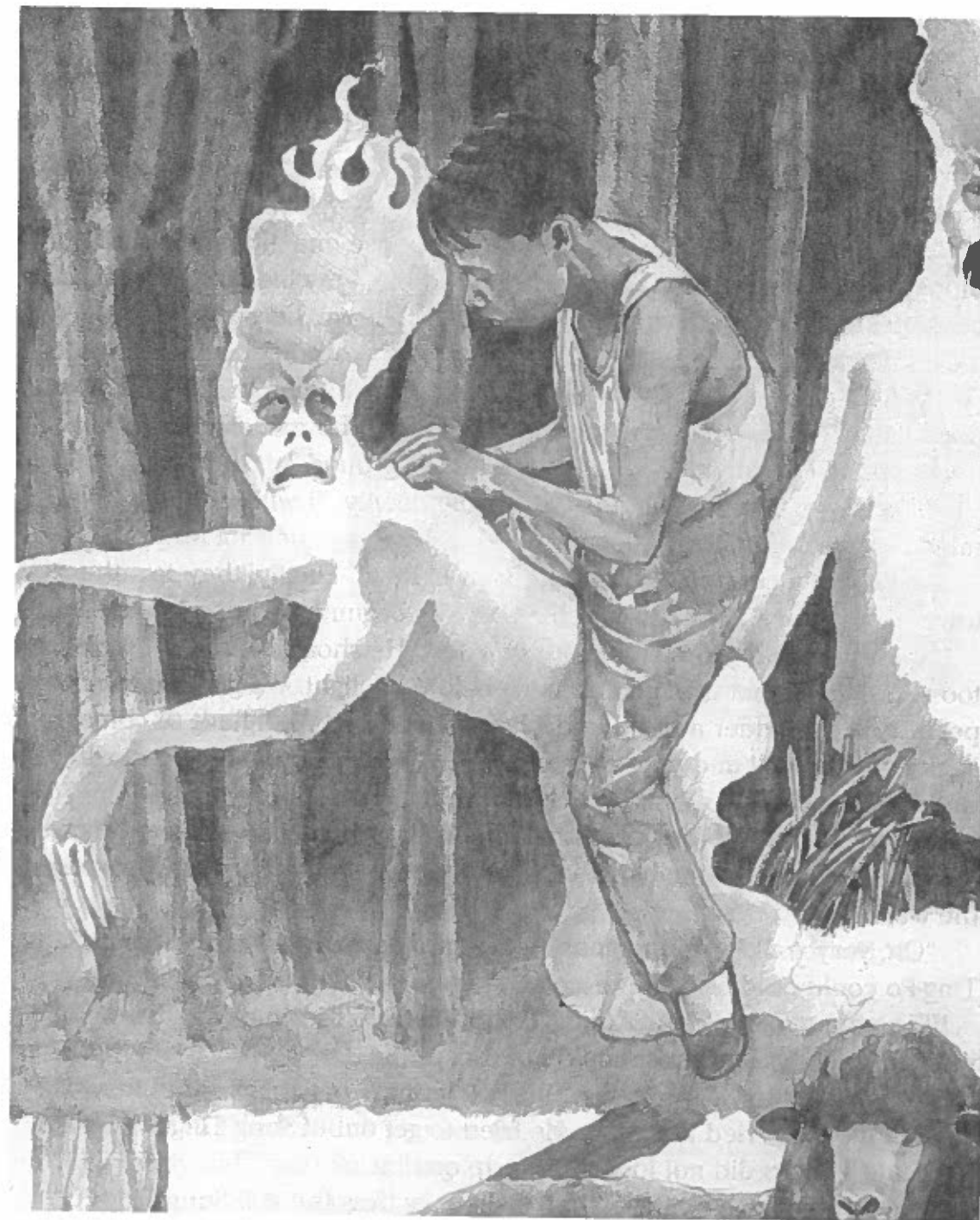
"Ooof!" said the ghost as Sung Ting-Po climbed onto his back. "You are very heavy. Are you sure you're a ghost?"

Sung Ting-Po said, "I guess I'll get lighter as I get older. I'm still very new at being a ghost."

"Ah, hum, well, even as a new ghost I was never as heavy as you," said the ghost.

They continued in this way for some time. Then they came to a river. The ghost crossed first. He floated easily over the water like a flower petal on a summer breeze. But Sung Ting-Po splashed his way across. He made great waves in the water. He got **soaked** up to his waist.

Sung Ting-Po dripped onto the far bank of the river. The ghost said, "What a mess you are! What a noise you made! Are you *sure* you're a ghost?"



Sung Ting-Po threw up his hands. "Don't blame me! I'm still new at this. I don't know how to behave as a ghost yet. I don't know anything about ghosts. Why, I don't even know if there is anything ghosts ought to be afraid of. Does anything bother us ghosts?"

"Ah, hum, well—you need not worry. There is almost nothing we ghosts have to fear."

"*Almost* nothing?" said Sung Ting-Po. "Oh, wise one. If there is something I must **avoid**, please tell me! It would be terrible if my life as a ghost were cut short because of something I didn't know. Please, help me with your great knowledge."

"Well," said the ghost, "there is one thing. It is human breath. We ghosts don't like to be breathed on by humans. If humans breathe on us, we can't float in the air anymore. We must walk on the ground."

"Thank you," said Sung Ting-Po, bowing deeply. "I will keep that in mind."

And so they continued down the Wan Li Road. Finally, they saw the town of Wan ahead of them. But the sun was beginning to rise in the east.

"Dear me. That's too bad," said the ghost. He shook his head. "We were too slow. We cannot make it into town before daylight. We ghosts are not **permitted** to wander around in daylight, you know. We'll have to come back tonight. We'll find your merchant then. Now we must return to where we have to go. Come along." The ghost began to disappear.

"Wait!" said Sung Ting-Po. "I don't know how to get to wherever it is we have to go. Please let me hang on to your sleeve so that you can show me the way."

"Oh, very well," said the ghost. He held out his right sleeve so that Sung Ting-Po could hold on to it.

The young man did. And Sung Ting-Po twisted the ghost's arm and held the ghost tightly. The ghost could not escape.

"I have you now!" said Sung Ting-Po.

"Let me go!" cried the ghost. He tried to get out of Sung Ting-Po's grasp. But Sung Ting-Po did not loosen his grip one bit.

The ghost changed himself into a slippery frog. But still Sung Ting-Po

held him. He changed into a tiger. But Sing Ting-Po did not let the tiger's teeth or claws touch him. The ghost became a bear. But still Sung Ting-Po was stronger. At last, the ghost turned into a big, black sheep. Then Sung Ting-Po breathed on him and turned him around toward the light of the sun.

"Thank you for your lesson, most excellent ghost," said Sung Ting-Po. "Now you must stay in this shape. And you must walk on the ground, just as you said."

"Baaaahh," said the ghost.

And Sung Ting-Po took the rope from his pocket. He tied the rope around the sheep's neck. Cheerfully, he led the sheep down the road into the town of Wan.

His two friends were very surprised when Sung Ting-Po returned to Nanyang. He looked well fed. He was wearing a new pair of shoes.

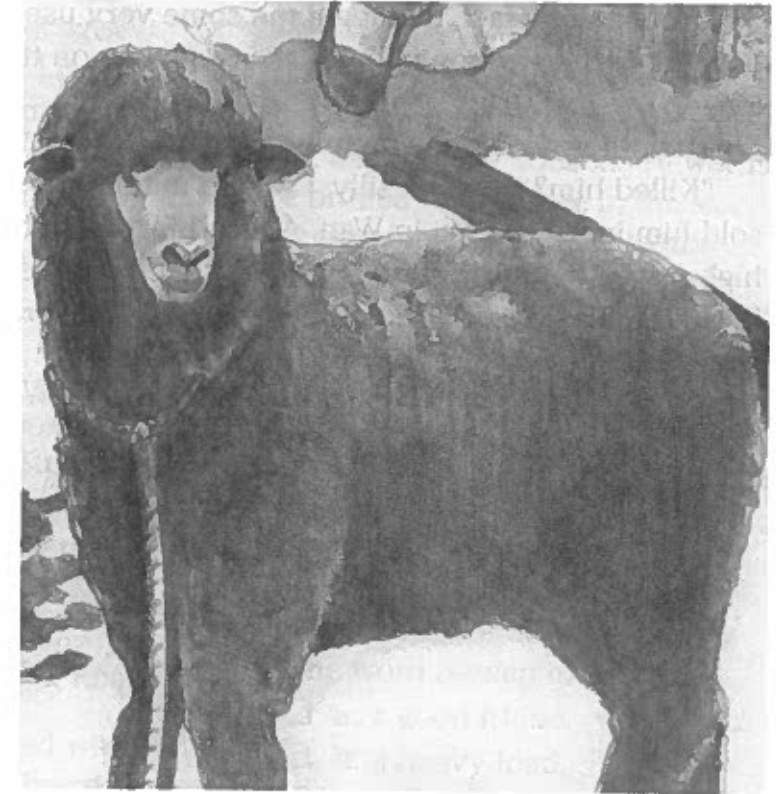
"Where have you been?" they asked. "How did you come by this good luck?"

"I went to the market at Wan by way of the Wan Li Road."

"The Wan Li Road! Didn't you see the ghost?"

"I certainly did," said Sung Ting-Po.

"Didn't he try to hurt you?"



"Not at all. In fact, he taught me some very useful things. But you don't have to worry. He won't be bothering anyone on the Wan Li Road any longer."

The other two young men looked astonished. "You killed the ghost?"

"Killed him? Don't be silly. I waited until he turned into a sheep. Then I sold him in the market in Wan. A fine, big, black sheep can sell for a very high price." And with that, Sung Ting-Po continued down the street. Coins jingled in his pockets. The others watched and scratched their heads in wonder.



LOOKING FOR FACTS IN THE STORY.
How well can you find facts in a story? Put an *x* in the box next to the right answer.

1. Sung Ting-Po said that he was planning to go
 - a. into the forest.
 - b. to the lake.
 - c. to the market at Wan.
2. The two men warned Sung Ting-Po not to
 - a. chop wood during the summer.
 - b. stay up after dark.
 - c. walk on the Wan Li Road.
3. Sung said that he walked with his feet on the ground because he
 - a. enjoyed walking that way.
 - b. was still a new ghost.
 - c. wanted to be different from the other ghosts.
4. What did Sung do with the big, black sheep?
 - a. He sold it.
 - b. He killed it.
 - c. He gave it to his friends.

	x 5 =	
NUMBER CORRECT		YOUR SCORE

EXAMINING VOCABULARY WORDS.
Here are four vocabulary questions. Put an *x* in the box next to the right answer. The vocabulary words are printed in **boldface** in the story. You may look back at the words before you answer the questions.

1. Sung got soaked in the water. The word **soaked** means
 - a. very angry.
 - b. very funny.
 - c. very wet.
2. The ghost was no burden to carry because he was so light. The word **burden** means
 - a. a good friend.
 - b. a heavy load.
 - c. a happy time.
3. He wanted to avoid danger. The word **avoid** means
 - a. keep away from.
 - b. try to meet.
 - c. fight with.
4. Ghosts are not permitted to wander around during the day. The word **permitted** means
 - a. needed.
 - b. allowed.
 - c. worried.

	x 5 =	
NUMBER CORRECT		YOUR SCORE

ADDING WORDS TO A PARAGRAPH. Complete the paragraph below. Fill in each blank with one of the words in the box. Each word appears in the story. There are five words and four blanks, so one word in the box will not be used.

Many people love to tell _____ stories at night by a campfire. Then, all the _____ of the evening suddenly come alive. The shadows in the darkness can _____ scare you. You feel afraid, though you know that there really is nothing to _____.

sounds market easily
fear ghost

x 5 =
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

READING BETWEEN THE LINES. These questions will help you think critically. You will have to think about what happened in the story, and then figure out the answers. Put an *x* in the box next to the right answer.

- Sung Ting-Po was able to get the better of the ghost by
 - a. scaring it.
 - b. tricking it.
 - c. killing it.
- Who helped Sung the most?
 - a. the two young men
 - b. a farmer from the village
 - c. the ghost himself
- We may infer (figure out) that the ghost
 - a. will continue to guard the Wan Li Road.
 - b. will no longer guard the Wan Li Road.
 - c. will escape from the market at Wan.
- At the end of the story, the two men were
 - a. angry.
 - b. afraid.
 - c. amazed.

x 5 =
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

NOTING STORY ELEMENTS. Some story elements are **plot**, **character**, **setting**, and **mood**. Put an *x* in the box next to the right answer.

- What happened first in the *plot*?
 - a. Sung Ting-Po met the ghost.
 - b. Sung started walking along the Wan Li Road.
 - c. Sung returned to Nanyang with a new pair of shoes.
- Which word *characterizes* Sung Ting-Po?
 - a. clever
 - b. rich
 - c. scared
- The story is *set*
 - a. in a village and on a road.
 - b. in a large city.
 - c. at a busy market.
- The *mood* of the story is
 - a. very serious.
 - b. very sad.
 - c. light and amusing.

x 5 =
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

THINKING MORE ABOUT THE STORY. Your teacher might want you to write your answers.

- ◆ Sung Ting-Po had a very quick mind. Give examples from the story that show that Sung was clever.
- ◆ Why do you think the ghost believed what Sung Ting-Po told him? Give as many reasons as you can.
- ◆ At the end of the story, Sung told his two friends what happened. Do you think they believed him? Why?

Use the boxes below to total your scores for the exercises. Then write your score on pages 138 and 139.

LOOKING FOR FACTS IN THE STORY
+
 EXAMINING VOCABULARY WORDS
+
 ADDING WORDS TO A PARAGRAPH
+
 READING BETWEEN THE LINES
+
 NOTING STORY ELEMENTS
▼
 SCORE TOTAL: Story 8