

Curing the Patient

Kan bing

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The following episode takes place several years later. Cao Cao stands with an enormous army north of the Yangzi River, while Liu Bei and his allies are preparing their counter-attack from the south of the river. This time the focus is shifted to the side of Liu Bei and his military advisor Zhuge Liang. A short time before the famous battle at Red Cliff, a general on Liu Bei's side, Zhou Yu, also called Zhou Gong-jin, has fallen ill. Lu Su, the general's trusted official, decides to send for Zhuge Liang, who is spending the days in pleasant leisure on board a small riverboat. When Lu Su enters the boat, the two men begin a conversation.

Curing the Patient

Told by

Gao Zaihua 高再華

“Master, you have not been ashore for two days now, why?”

“It's windy ashore!”

“Oh, yes, winter is coming. You are doing well in keeping off the wind in this small boat, master!”

“I have no business ashore!”

“Well, today you have!”

“What business?”

“Oh, do you really not know? Or do you only pretend not to know?”

“I really do not know.”

“Well, if you really do not know, I'll tell you: there is someone who has fallen ill!”

“Who has fallen ill?”

“Our great general Zhou Gongjin has fallen ill.”

“Really? Has Gongjin fallen ill?”

“Yes, our great general is ill.”

“Oh my! Ha, ha, ha, ha ...”

‘What a mess! Is he delirious? Damn it, he hasn’t understood a word!’

“Please, Zhuge Liang, this is not proper, somebody has fallen ill and you are laughing! As long as one can still eat the five grains without pretence, one is not in for bad luck, but can one guarantee that

“Ha, ha, ha, ha...”

“Three days ago ...”

one will never suffer from illness all of one’s life?”

“Why would I laugh about your general?”

“Well, if you are not laughing about our general, fine, but then you should not pretend to laugh about him. Why do you actually laugh?”

“My laughter is because I was struck with amazement over myself.”

“Oh, master!” - ‘When were you ever struck with amazement over anybody else? You are always amazed about yourself.’ - “Why are you amazed this time?”

“Three days ago, I noticed a sign of illness on the face of your general, and I guessed that a serious illness would break out within three days. Today the doctors are giving the message that Gongjin truly is ill. Obviously my eyesight is not lacking.”

“That’s a remark of a know-all. I could say so, too: ‘Three years ago I noticed a sign of illness on the face of our general, and guessed that after three years a serious illness would break out’, anybody could say so, couldn’t he? You might have given me, Lu Su, a hint three days ago and said: ‘Your general doesn’t look well in his face, he will get ill in three days’ time’. Since he is actually ill now, I would have been

amazed with you.”

“If you are not amazed with me, so what! Let me ask you something: How has your general acquired this illness?”

“How he has acquired his illness? I was not present, but his men told me. He was at Nanping Hill to see the troops drilling. When he saw Cao Cao drilling his naval army, a sudden wind blew up, and a corner of his own flag flicked him on his cheek. He tried to pull it away, but who would imagine that he couldn’t get rid of it, try as he may. Suddenly he groaned: ‘Ah!’, began to spit fresh blood, and tumbled to the ground at Nanping Hill. In this way he got ill.”

“Have you already asked for the doctors to cure his illness?”

“Yes, I have of course asked for the doctors.”

“Whom have you asked for?”

“I have asked four military doctors. But all they have to say is wrong! The words of these four military doctors are simply not worth listening to: something like ‘innate defect’, ‘lost manhood’, ‘indigestion in the abdomen’, ‘suffering from excessive internal heat’, ‘suffering from excessive humidity’. Wrong! Our general has torn all of their prescriptions to pieces.”

“Ah, - Sir, you are mistaken!”

“Oh, how come I am mistaken?”

“Your general has aristocratic blood. The military doctors can only cure the trivial diseases of ordinary soldiers, how would they be able to cure your general?”

“You are right, I understand.”

“You must find a renowned doctor at Three River Junction to treat him.”

“There is no renowned doctor at Three River Junction, and if there were, I would already have invited him.”

“What will you do now then?”

“I had no other way out than to send a man to Chaisang to invite a certain gentleman. This gentleman is very famous. Though he is not a national champion in medicine, his treatment always cures the illness.”

“When will this doctor from Chaisang arrive in the camp?”

“The doctor from Chaisang, well... My relative is riding a fast horse to Chaisang and the gentleman will not put on airs, he will follow him immediately. They will arrive tomorrow at noon.”

“Is there a possibility that he will arrive earlier?”

“Earlier? If he comes earlier, maybe he could be there around ten in the morning.”

“Not earlier?”

“No, it is a long journey.”

“Alas!”

“Oh, Master, how frightening it is that you break out into this ‘Alas!’”

“Alas!”

“What? Why do you cry out twice ‘Alas!’?”

“The doctor from Chaisang will be late! Tonight in the third watch the bell is tolling for your general.”

“Ugh! Do not place a curse on him! I have just come from him, and he had good colour, his eyes were lively and he spoke clearly. How can you say that tonight in the third watch his life is at stake?”

“Don’t you believe me?”

“I cannot believe you.”

“Dear Sir, we have spent quite a few days

together. Was there ever a time when I, Zhuge Liang, was wrong in my pronouncements?"

"Master, when you mention this, you scare me so much! Everything you have ever said has been right. Now you say that our general's life is at stake tonight in the third watch, and that won't do! Nobody has been able to cure our general's illness, and on the other shore Cao Cao has a million armed troops, what

“Why do you cry out twice ‘Alas’!?”

“Why don’t you find a well-esteemed doctor in Three River Junction?”

are we to do about it? As soon as Cao Cao sets his great army in motion, and we on the east side of the Yangzi River have no defence, this will also be inconvenient for your Lord [Liu Bei] and his men. Master, please, please, help me to think of a way out!”

“Since the doctor from Chaisang will not be able to arrive in time, why don’t you find a well esteemed doctor in Three River Junction?”

“If there were a well esteemed doctor in Three River Junction, I would call for him, but there isn’t! Most people in this area are poor, the rich have moved away. A well-esteemed doctor couldn’t hold his ground here. Only the rich ask for the doctor, when the poor fall ill, they must suffer through it. There is no doctor.”

“There surely is!”

“No possibility!”

“There must be!”

“Not necessarily!”

“Pardon?”

“Well, I am from the region east of the Yangzi River, shouldn’t I know better than you?”

“Please, think it over again, there must be one.”

‘What a nuisance! I tell him there is none, and he insists that there is!’

“Oh, now I see! You certainly have a friend in mind who practices medicine on his own, don’t you, Master?”

“You have guessed it, Sir. I, Zhuge Liang, do have a friend who practices medicine.”

“Wonderful! Since he is a friend of yours, though he is not a national champion in medicine, his treatment surely will cure the illness. Good! May I ask you the honourable name and residence of your

distinguished friend? I, Lu Su, will send a messenger to invite him over to cure the illness of our general.”

“Please, don’t!”

“Please, don’t?! Oh, he is a man of high position! What about this way, then? I do not send my men, but I, Lu Su, a high official and military counsellor from the region east of the Yangzi River, will personally call at his home. When I call on him in his residence, I will indeed offer him a lot of face, and he will surely come with me, won’t he?”

“My goodness, my goodness! Such a great official and military counsellor! But though the position of my friend is high, he is still not likely to come.”

“This friend of mine is prepared to help the world, he is not concerned about money.”

‘If I offer him money, I treat him like a profit-monger!’

“Oh, he will still not come? What about this way, then? He practices medicine and all he wants is money. I shall bring a large sum of gold and silver, and then he will come, I suppose?”

“This friend of mine is prepared to help the world, he is not concerned about money. If you try to persuade him with money, you are treating him like a profit-monger!”

‘What a nuisance! Even if I go in person, my position is too low! If I offer him money, I treat him like a profit-monger!’

“That man is a nuisance, even though he is your friend, he is a nuisance! But OK! Let me tell you what! I tell you this as sure as I am Lu Su: If I send a messenger, he won’t come. If I go myself, he still won’t come. If I give him money, he doesn’t want it. At that point, I may very well go to the army and ask for a military order to bring him to the camp and treat the illness of our general. He is a man from our place east of the River and he won’t dare to refuse our order!”

“Ah! You certainly are a person of strong will, Sir! If someone belongs to your domain, he will take

order from you. But if he does not belong to your region east of the River, why should he take order from you? If my friend is hurt, he would rather die than come to your camp and cure the illness of your general. And if nobody comes to treat your general's illness, he will also die, and they will both come to a sad end!"

"Please, Master, whom are you turning against

"I see! It must be you yourself that knows how to practice medicine?"

on behalf of this man? Look, just tell me the honourable name and residence of your noble friend! Whether he will come or not is none of your business!"

"Agreed!"

"Wonderful! Well, let me ask you the honourable name of your noble friend?"

"Try and guess: He is 'close in front, distant at the horizon'."

'What a nuisance, keeping me guessing here. 'Close in front, distant at the horizon' ... Woe me! At the horizon one would never find him. In front ... '

"Ah, Master, does your servant boy practice medicine?"

“No!”

“No? I see! It must be you yourself that knows how to practice medicine?”

“You have guessed it all right, Sir! I, Zhuge Liang, do know how to practice medicine! ”

“Wonderful! We have spent quite some days together, and yet I didn’t know that you were able to practice medicine. My Master is surely a champion in medicine, sorry I didn’t recognize it, sorry, sorry! Let me ask you with deep respect to come to our camp and treat the illness of our general.”

“At home I have long since hung out my sign and set up business.”

“Wonderful! It is much better to engage in battle than to read a classic on strategy like *Wang Zihe*. You have already hung out your shingle and set up business, that’s even better!”

“On my sign are written seven characters. If you can guess what characters, I’ll follow you. If you cannot, I won’t.”

‘What a nuisance! Now he wants me to guess the seven characters on his shingle! OK! OK! OK! I need you, so I’ll try and guess.’

“Let me first interrogate you: The two first characters on your shingle, are they ‘historical tradition’, ‘ancestral tradition’ or ‘family tradition’?”

“ ‘Historical tradition’ .”

“Well, ‘historical tradition’. Do these two characters belong together with the seven characters?”

“No!”

“No?! Then the seven characters must form a single column in the middle. Maybe you have the name of some fortune-teller or magician?”

“No!”

“No? If not, then it must be the three characters of Zhuge Liang?”

“Yes.”

“And the four characters below must tell what kind of illness you treat?”

“Not bad!”

“Wonderful! Oh, if I can guess it, you will follow me. Let me first interrogate you again. You must be within the thirteen medical disciplines. If you are outside the thirteen disciplines, I cannot guess it.”

“I’m of course within the thirteen disciplines.”

“Fine! I have to make myself clear to you, because it is not easy to talk to you. The first discipline is ‘prayers and blessings’, I suppose this is not your field, Master?”

What is understood by the discipline of ‘prayers and blessings’? This discipline is the method of drawing magic symbols to cure people’s diseases. The first among the thirteen disciplines is called ‘prayers and blessings’.

“I do not draw magic symbols.”

“I thought so, too, that you would not draw magic symbols, Master. The last of the disciplines is probably also nothing for you, the discipline of ‘joking and laughing’?”

What is meant by the discipline of ‘joking and laughing’? That is storytelling. Did storytelling also belong among the thirteen medical disciplines? Yes, because for your digestion it is a good thing to laugh a

It is a good thing to
laugh a couple of times a
day.

couple of times a day, and therefore the final category
of the thirteen disciplines is 'joking and laughing'.

"I'm not a storyteller."

"You are not a storyteller. Then I only have to
guess among the eleven disciplines in the middle.
Listen now: 'Zhuge Liang: specialist in big and small
pulse', are these seven characters right?"

"No."

"'Zhuge Liang: specialist in inner and outer
pulse', are these seven characters right?"

"No."

"'Zhuge Liang: specialist in gynaecology and
paediatrics'?"

"No."

"'Zhuge Liang: specialist in children's
smallpox'?"

"No."

"'Zhuge Liang: acupuncturist and ophthal-
mologist'?"

"No."

"'Zhuge Liang: laryngologist and dentist'?"

"No."

"'Zhuge Liang: surgeon'?"

"No."

"'Zhuge Liang: specialist in venereal
diseases'?"

"No."

"'Zhuge Liang: specialist in general
medicine'?"

"No."

“Are these seven characters right?”

“Master, please, do not ridicule me! I have guessed on all the possibilities from one end to the other. If you are not within the thirteen disciplines, then, please, tell me!”

“I suppose you cannot guess it.”

“Yes, I also see that I am not able to guess it, and so I beg you to tell me!”

“ ‘Zhuge Liang: specialist in heart disease [*xinbing*].’ ”

“Wonderful! Our general never had a chronic disease, so if you will treat this new illness [*xinbing*], that he has just been stricken by, he shall be cured at once!”

Really? He was far off the mark! What Zhuge Liang meant to say was ‘heart’ [*xin*], the ‘heart’ of ‘heart and lung’. But what Lu Su said was ‘new’ [*xin*] as in ‘new and old’. Probably because the two words are homonyms, so Lu Su was mistaken.

“I implore you to come to our camp and treat the illness of our general!”

“I will not.”

“Why do you decline again?”

“You general has earlier harmed me twice. If I

Disease

bing

◆ 病

Heart

xin

◆ 心

New

xin

◆ 新

cure his illness, he may harm me again!”

“No way! Master, it is true that he harmed you. But if you cure his illness, he will be grateful to you. You know very well that a gentleman remembers kindness and forgets grievances. Please, listen to me, Lu Su! I guarantee you won’t be wrong. Please, Master, I implore you to come to our camp to treat the

Translator's note to the text:

This performance of 20 minutes was recorded in the private home of Gao Zaihua in Yangzhou, on 1 November 1997. Some of Mr. Gao's students were present and together with the authors made up the small audience. The occasion was more like a rehearsal for the students in so far as the episode is told as if the listeners are not only well acquainted with the preceding and following events, but completely conversant with the text. The photos were taken by Jette Ross in May 2000, during a performance of the same story in the home of Gao

illness of our general!”

“I, Zhuge Liang, cannot go yet.”

“Please, you have already told me the seven characters on your shingle, why not come along now?”

“I haven't received an order from you, Sir!”

“Oh, my! I, your servant, am fully aware that you are able to cure the patient, and I wouldn't dare to talk about orders! Ha, ha, ha, ha! I was off my mind and talking nonsense just now, damned it! I hope you will forgive me, Master! Please, come to our camp and treat the illness of our general!”

“Alas, if I followed my own will, I, Zhuge Liang, wouldn't go.”

“Oh, no, no, no! Please, only take after me, Lu Su!”

“Well, since you entreat me so piteously again and again, Sir, ...”

“My goodness, how badly it sounds!”

“... then, please, show me the way!”

“Wonderful! The saying is ‘to call for the doctor is like fighting a fire’: we certainly need you,

Zaihua.

Master! Let me show you the way, Master! Please, follow me, Master!”

With Lu Su leading the way and Zhuge Liang following behind, they stepped on the gangplank and went ashore. Soon they arrived at the great camp in order to cure the illness of Zhou Yu.

Yangzhou, 1 November, 1997