

Worldly And Underworldly Wise Men

By Justice Kocher

One morning, as I came in from doing the chores, I saw a very nicely dressed man approaching my cottage door. It was very cold so I invited him in for a cup of hot spiced tea my wife was making. He was very glad and other than a contemptuous glance at the string that bound our door he was quite grateful. He introduced himself as Mr. Knowelot and said he had come to teach the children of our town from his vast knowledge of the English language and mathematics.

“It is interesting how many of the young offspring in this province,” he said, “don’t know how to speak Latin, the tongue of our forefathers; few would have guessed that John Calvin invented trigonometry or that Patrick Henry bred the finest Arabians known to man.” He explained that he had not only had a school built but also a temple which he for some reason thought we needed.

After he left that evening as I walked out to do the chores I tripped in a hole and fell but instead of hitting the ground as I had expected, I continued my trajectory downward at a rapid pace. When I landed, I found myself in a large wheat field. To my right there was a grove of trees, but directly in front of me many workers were reaping the harvest. But on closer inspection I found that some of the scouts were being ridden by ponies. I also saw that the men were extremely strong and when a wagon got stuck they would have the men instead of more horses help to pull it out. While I was watching all this, I realized that the weather was quite warm and, though I was unsure whether I was sweating from the heat or excitement I quickly shed my cloak. Just as I did so I was either spotted or scented by a Pony sentry on a human back who immediately galloped his mount towards me yipping and whooping. I was unceremoniously shoved towards the center of activity. When we got there the boss, a well groomed athletic-looking man, seemed utterly unconcerned, but when he saw my weak muscles and heard me say I was new to the place, his surprise was obvious.

“Did you hear that,” he said.

“Yes,” said the sentry who had found me. “Lock him in the garden until I can talk to him, and give him some lunch while he waits.” I was brought to the gardens where I was given a meal of bread, cheese and milk and although the milk tasted strange I thoroughly enjoyed the rest and food.

Late in the afternoon, I saw a strange procession heading towards the garden. Sitting in a tall horse drawn coach was a man I decided was the emperor. Following this were some robed lords and ladies trying to keep up with the carriage. As they neared the garden, a roughly clad servant was sent to unlock the spiked gate. When I neared the emperor he gave me a stern look saying, "I hear that you come from a different land, why have you come, where did you enter and what is your name?"

Mr. John Smith," I replied.

"Where do you live," he inquired.

"New York, your majesty. I've never been in this land before," I said.

"We shall take you on a tour," he said. "We will leave directly."

I was invited to sit in the coach in a seat that afforded a good view of the countryside. As we drove along, he explained some of the many sites I saw. He told me we would drive around the countryside visiting the many farms in his kingdom and in the evening he would take me out to dine. The first farm we came to made me feel very at home. It had a little brown cottage with red and brown barns alongside the fields, but what surprised me was the type of livestock inside the barns. The chickens were truly gargantuan, more than five times the size of a normal hen. Men were milking dogs and collecting eggs from small cows. And to my great astonishment packs of dogs were being herded by small flocks of nimble sheep.

When the emperor showed me the barns I was horrified to see that they not only kept but farmed the dogs. I was still recovering from that when we set off towards the races. I began to wish it was a dream, but the fact that I was hurting from the carriage ride over bumpy terrain assured me I would have to attempt escape when I had a chance. When we arrived at the track there was still time to eat before the race began, so the emperor led me into a nearby tavern. I hadn't thought of it before, but as the emperor ordered our food the thought came to me that I might have to eat dog meat or drink more of the strange milk that seemed so common among the people there. Still I was not expecting these foods were delicacies and considered fine foods by the emperor himself. As the tray was brought out, I noticed to my great dismay that whatever was under the cover on the platter reeked. While I choked down my meal, the emperor started a conversation. He said that he had already visited New York himself, and wished to

return. He seemed to remember seeing many Arab sheiks in the street. He also said that he was usually offered meals there consisting of pesto pasta and sheep milk and that the majority of religious people he met followed a religion called Hindu. I was very relieved when the Clock Struck five and we began our way to the track. Instead of the horses having jockeys they were led to the starting gates and from there they ran by themselves chasing a dogsheep until one of the horses caught it. After the race the emperor said he wished for me to stay in the land of his majesty Ching Wong (a name he said was quite common in New York) for a longer length of time. On the drive back to the palace, I noticed that there were men running easily alongside the carriage, and the speed with which they moved fascinated me so much that I couldn't help watching them even though my worries of escaping were so great. That evening I wanted to go to bed early so that I could have time to ponder my plight. At first I was scared to ask, but the emperor was in such good humor that I told him I was tired from the long journey and wished to be shown to my room. He readily assented and I was soon led to a plain but comfortable little room.

This time I was not locked up but just giving privacy. although my mind was racing I forced myself to feign sleep. Though I thought for what seemed an hour I still didn't come up with an overly bright plan so I decided I would just make a run for it. Although I jumped out of bed silently, I was promptly surrounded by servants wondering what I needed. I didn't have many choices so I said quite sharply, "I am not accustomed to having my privacy intruded upon so. Thankfully they only smiled and walked quite far down the hall. I took my chance and quickly made for the opposite end of the palace. I saw a door and entered it, went down the staircase behind it, and thankfully found that I was in the royal gardens very near the gate. I was so happy that it was unlocked that I had almost betrayed myself before I remembered I was on a mission of secrecy. As soon as I was on the outside of the garden gates, I broke into a run that was intended to put distance between me and the palace. But before I had gone a hundred yards, I saw the outline of a pony riding a man. I was at first surprised, but I then realized it was probably a trained guard pony. I thought I might be able to sneak past it, so getting on my hands and knees I started to crawl around. I had to go quite far around and away from the pair and thought all was well when a screeching whinny from behind announced that I was spotted and the chase was on. I

sprinted toward a grove of trees to my right for the cover of the leaves. But though I ran as fast as I could, my pursuers were fleet as deer and almost had me by the time I reached the trees. As I broke out the other side of the grove I was at the point of giving up hope when I saw my cloak lying on the ground and straight above it was a mysterious tunnel. I leapt up into the tunnel just as my attackers ran beneath me! I saw that snow was falling, almost blocking my view but through it I saw the comforting half octagon shape of the barn roof. I gave the animals a quick feeding since I was shivering with cold and made my way towards the house. Although I was freezing I couldn't help but stop by the hole I had fallen into, it was still there and still the same but not wishing to fall in again I struck out towards the house.

Next morning I decided to go to town to relate my adventure and buy food at the market. After I'd been to the store I was walking towards auction when I saw my friend Mr. Knowelot walking down the street. He greeted me warmly when he saw me and asked how I was doing.

"Quite fine, quite fine," I said. "But—I had quite a strange experience yesterday after you left our house. I accidentally visited his majesty King Wong's land. It was very stra..."

"Oh yes the dear old Monkey King of the great Vermont rainforest just up the river! I've been there many a time; that's the place I bought my dog," he said, patting the head of a dog I knew was just one of the neighborhood mongrels he had adopted. "She was a present from the magical advisor of his majesty Edward ... or no ... umm ... Hong Ting ... I think."

"Well," I said sarcastically, "I'm glad you know so much about this land."

"Oh my friend should we go tell all about this place we found? It's an easy distance to the tavern from here."

"No" I replied. "Not now, you can go yourself though."

He had finally begun to realize that I could see through his head, so he only stuttered once or twice and left. That evening I checked the hole again and found it was gone, so I don't think I'll ever go there again, but often as I sit by the fire I think how many other people like Mr. Knowelot and Emperor Ching Wong there must be.