

Two Peacocks

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两只小孔雀

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*T*HE RICE fields along the Lantsang River in China's Yunnan Province are rich with golden harvest. While the grown-ups are busy in the fields, a Tai nationality Little Red Guard, Yenla, goes with his little brother Hsiaotuan to help Grandpa herd cattle every day after school.

The Inner Mongolian grassland is beautiful and fresh after last night's rain. Early in the morning the 13-year-old Wuligetu and his younger sister Chichig, of Mongolian nationality, are off on their ponies to graze the commune's flock of sheep.





Suddenly Wuligetu notices that the grass has been trodden. He dismounts to have a look and finds deep camel tracks.

Who has passed by? Is it the army-militia joint patrol?
No, they ride horses. It's not the herders either; there
is no sign of sheep. The children begin to wonder.



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Wuligetu says, "Chairman Mao teaches us that '*under no circumstances must we relax our vigilance.*' Yesterday Father told me that a herder had his camel stolen while he was shopping at the Banner store. Could these tracks have been made by that camel?" "What are we going to do?" Chichig asks anxiously.





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"Don't worry," says Wuligetu. "You stay here and watch the flock. I'll follow the tracks and see where they lead." The boy mounts his pony and sets off.

The sun rises higher and the grassland is covered in mist. As Wuligetu approaches the fringe of the Gobi Desert the grass becomes sparser.

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The trail is difficult to follow. But Wuligetu remembers his father telling him that the Gobi stones are worn smooth on top by the wind and rain, while underneath they are rough. Wuligetu finds some of the stones turned over. This gives him a clue in following the trail.



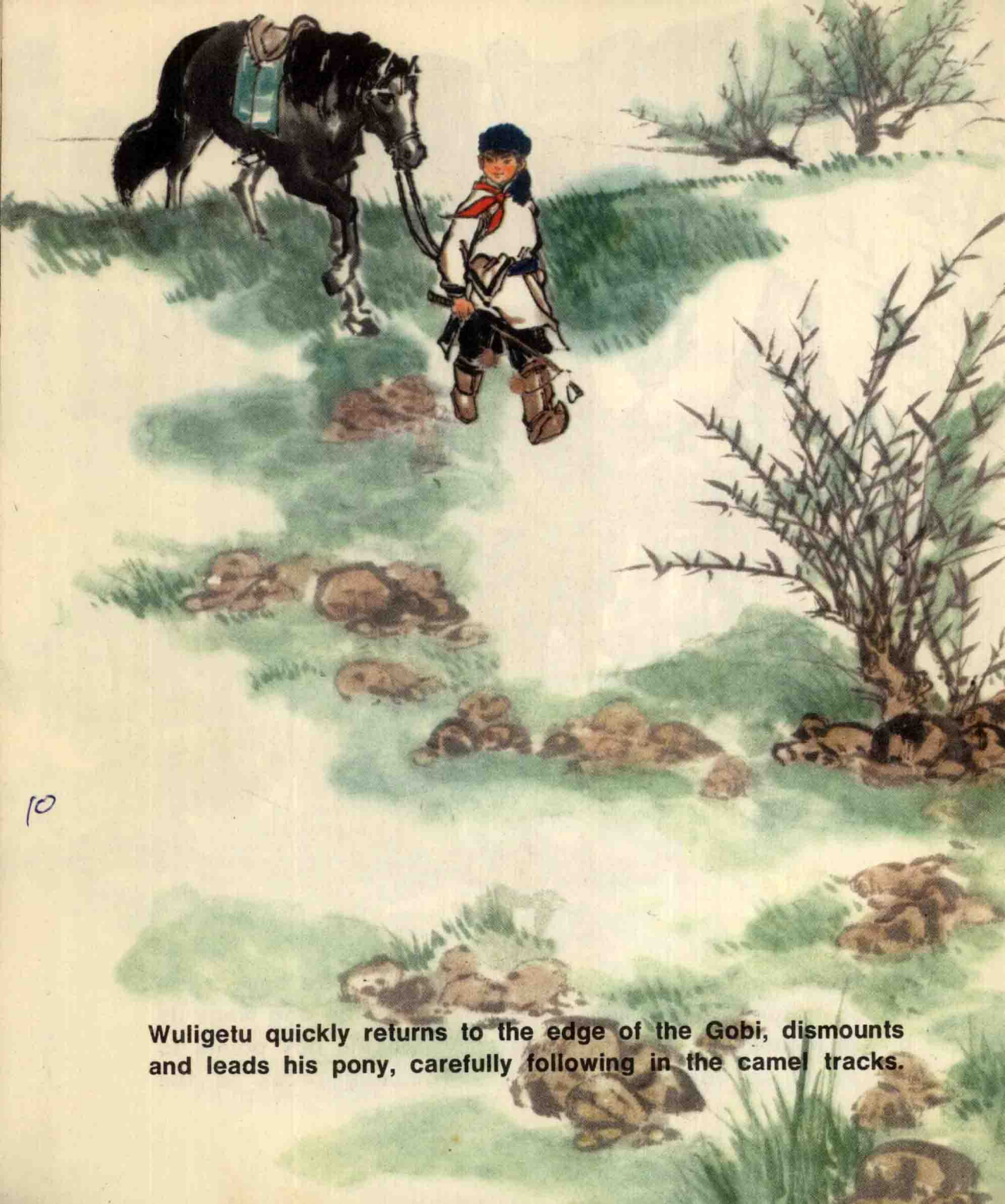


8

He rides back quickly to tell his sister. "You go to the sentry-post at once, Chichig, and call Father," he says. "Leave the flock with Shepherd Dog Duripo. I'll follow those tracks!" Chichig rides off immediately.



Wuligetu pats the sleek, furry dog and says, "We have a job to do, Duripo. You must guard the flock." The dog wags its tail as it looks at its young master. Then the boy points to the flock and commands, "Go!" The dog races to the bellwether.



10

Wuligetu quickly returns to the edge of the Gobi, dismounts and leads his pony, carefully following in the camel tracks.



He reaches the Chumar River,
where there is a grove of leafy
wild date trees. Has the person
with the camel gone in there?
Wuligetu wonders.

But the tracks do not lead into the grove. Wuligeu follows them to the river bank and then crosses on his pony.



**He searches
up and down
the opposite
bank but finds
no tracks.**

