Rickshaw Boy

Rickshaw Boy

洋車夫

by Lau Shaw

老舍著

Translated from the Chinese

by Evan King

REYNAL & HITCHCOCK, NEW YORK

COPYRIGHT 1945 BY REYNAL & HITCHCOCK, INC.

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form.

Fourth Printing

This complete edition is produced in full compliance with the government's regulations for conserving paper and other essential materials.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE CORNWALL PRESS, CORNWALL, N. Y.

I

THE PERSON we want to introduce is Happy Boy and not Camel, because Camel is only his nickname. So we will first speak of Happy Boy, and when we have reached that point we will relate how he came to be connected with a camel, whereafter we will forget the sobriquet and call him by his proper name anyway, which should settle the matter.

We hope to describe Happy Boy's position with the same definiteness with which one would indicate the place of a certain bolt in a machine. Before he came to be connected with the nickname "Camel," he was one of those relatively independent rickshaw coolies, which is to say that he belonged to that group of strong young pullers who moreover own their own rickshaws; with their own rickshaws they have their own livelihood: they are the high-class rickshaw men.

But that certainly is no easy point to reach. A year, two years—three or four years at the very least; one drop of sweat, two drops of sweat: no one knows how many tens upon countless tens of thousands of drops of sweat it took to earn that rickshaw. It was reaped from many and many a time that he had gritted his teeth in the wind and the rain and from his long self-denial in the food he ate and the tea he drank. That one rickshaw was the end result and final reward of all his struggling and suffering, like the medal worn by the soldier who has survived a hundred battles. In the days when he had rented someone else's rickshaw he had been like a top that was perpetually whipped to keep it spinning. In a dizzy whirl from early till late, from east to west, from south to north, there had been nothing he could call himself. But in all this spinning around his sight had not become blurred, nor his heart confused: he had thought always of a far-away rickshaw that would

free him, make him independent, and be as much a part of him as were his own hands and feet. With a rickshaw of his own he need no longer take the guff of the rickshaw owners, and there would be no need for lengthy explanations to any one else: with his own natural strength and his own rickshaw, he had only to keep his eyes open and he would have food to eat.

He was not afraid of hardship, nor did he have the bad habit that many rickshaw coolies had of condoning faults without making any effort to correct them: his mind and energy were both adequate to the task of turning his aspirations into facts. If his environment had been a little better, or if he had been given a little more education, he could certainly never have fallen into the rubber-tired corps, and in any case, whatever work he might have taken up, he would not have been insensible to his opportunities. Worse luck, he had no choice but to be a rickshaw coolie; all right, then, even in this trade he would prove his ability and his cleverness. It seemed as if even were he in hell he would still be a well-behaved devil.

He was born and raised in a village and had lost his mother and father and a few mou of ground, and when he was eighteen had come in to the city. He brought with him the country boy's robust health and guilelessness. At one time or another he worked at practically every one of the jobs in which one sells one's strength to get food to eat, but it was not long before he realized that pulling a rickshaw was an even easier way of earning money. In other kinds of manual labor there was a limit to your income; in rickshaw pulling there were more chances and better chances; you never knew at what time or in what place you might just happen to receive a greater reward than you had hoped for for your labors.

Naturally he also knew that this kind of chance was not altogether fortuitous; that it was necessary that both the man and his rickshaw be smart-looking and spirited, and that you had to have something of quality to sell before you could hope to meet with buyers who really knew quality.

Turning the matter over in his mind, Happy Boy felt sure he had the qualifications: he was strong, he was just in the prime of his youth; the only lack was that he had never pulled a rickshaw and did not dare

试读结束，需要全本PDF请购买 www.ertongbook.com

try out his hand on a brand-new one. But this was not a difficulty over which it was impossible to triumph: with his physique and physical strength as a basis, he need only experiment for ten days or two weeks, in which time he would certainly be able to acquire a stride that had some style to it, and then he would go rent a new rickshaw. There would be no way of knowing how soon after that he might get into a job by the month, where by frugal eating and careful spending for one or two years, or even if it were so long as three or four years, he would surely be able to get his own rickshaw, as smart as they come. Looking at his own young muscles, he told himself that the question was only one of time, that this was something he could certainly do: that it was not just a dream.

His height and strength were both developed in advance of his age; he was under twenty and already very big and tall. Although the passing months and years had not yet molded the physical bearing of his body into any particular form, yet he already had the appearance of a full-grown man—an adult in whose face and manner was the suggestion of a child's unaffected naturalness and mischievousness. Watching the high-class rickshaw men, he laid his plans to gird his loins among them, the better to show forth the iron strength of his own chest and the straight hardness of his back; he twisted his head to look at his own shoulders—they were broad enough. He would tighten his girdle and put on a pair of wide-legged white trousers which he would bind at the ankles with bands made from chickens' intestines, to show off his outsize feet. Right enough, there could be no doubt that he would become the best rickshaw man of them all! And like the simple country boy he was, he grinned largely at the prospect.

There was nothing special about his features—what made him likeable was the spirit in his expression. His head was small, his eyes round, his nose fleshy, his eyebrows very short and very coarse, and his head always shaved clean of hair. There was no surplus fat on his jowls, but his neck was almost as thick as his head, and his face was everlastingly as red as if it had just been slapped. A large scar between his right ear and cheek bone shone with special brightness—once during his childhood when he had fallen asleep under a tree a mule had taken a bite out of him. He didn't pay much attention to whether he was good-

looking or not: the thing he liked about his own face was the same thing he liked about his physique—both had a firm hard strength. It was as if he regarded his face as being in the same category with his arms and legs—if there was enough strength in it, it was all right. Yes, even after he had come to the city to live he could still turn a handspring, or even stand on his hands, with his head down, for half a day. In that difficult stance he felt that he was very much like a tree—there wasn't a single part of him, either up or down, that wasn't straight and firm.

It was assuredly true that even when he was standing upright Happy Boy did have something tree-like about him. He was sturdy, silent, and alive. He had his own plans, and he was not unintelligent, but it was hard for him to talk to other people. Among rickshaw men the wrongs which each has suffered and the difficulties with which each is confronted are proper subjects of public conversation. At the rickshaw stands at street intersections, in the little tea shops, or in the general market place, each man would report, describe, or just bawl out his personal affairs, and after that they would become a kind of capital of the whole group and would spread from one place to another like a new popular song.

Happy Boy was a countryman and his lips and tongue were not as quick and fast as those of fellows born and raised in the city. If quickness of the tongue is a matter of natural talent, it must be said that from the time he was a baby Happy Boy had never liked to talk very much, and on that account he was loath to imitate the spiteful lips and evil tongues of the city-dwellers. He knew about his own affairs himself and he wasn't happy to discuss them with other people. Because his lips were habitually unoccupied he had the leisure in which to think, and it seemed as if his eyes were always turned in on his own heart. It was only necessary that his mind should be made up, and he would follow the road opened up in it. If it happened that that road could not carry him to his objective, he was able to keep all words from his tongue for two or three days.

When he had decided to pull a rickshaw, he went directly to get a rickshaw to pull. He rented an old, broken-down one to try out his legs. The first day he earned no money; on the second his business was

quite good, but for the next two days he was flat on his back, his ankles swollen up like two calabashes and hurting so that he couldn't lift up his feet. He bore it without complaint, no matter how great the pain was, because he knew that this was unavoidable, that it was an experience through which every rickshaw man must pass. Until he had suffered it he would not dare to really stretch his legs and run.

After his ankles got well again, he was no longer afraid. He was as happy as he could be, because there was nothing more to be scared of: he was thoroughly familiar with the names of streets and places, and even if occasionally he took a fare the long way round to the place he wanted to go it made no great difference. Fortunately Happy Boy had plenty of strength, and that was what it took. Nor did he find it difficult to pick up from his own experience the various methods of handling his rickshaw—of pushing it back, pulling it, lifting it up, and using his shoulders. Moreover, he had his axioms to guide him: if you spent more time in being careful, and less in wrangling for right-of-way, there certainly wouldn't be much chance of your committing a serious fault.

When it came to haggling about prices and competing for fares, his tongue was too slow, and for all the vigor of his appearance he was no match for the old oilies. Knowing his weakness, he simply did not go to the rickshaw stands at the big intersections, but wherever there were no other rickshaws, there he would put his own. In these out-of-the-way places he could talk price without embarrassment, and when sometimes he was unwilling to ask a definite fare, he would simply say, "Get in and pay me whatever you feel like." His manner was so sincere and his face so simple and likeable that it seemed as if people could only believe him and did not dare to think that this great big country bumpkin could possibly be trying to trick them. If they suspected him of anything, it was that he had just come to the city and not knowing his way about the streets or how long the haul would be, he did not know what the price should be. When it got to a point that the prospective passenger would ask him, "Do you know where that address is?" he would only smile, in a way that made him seem to be either pretending to be stupid or trying to be coy, leaving the would-be passenger bewildered.

In two or three weeks' time he had got his legs worked into it, and

he realized that the style of running which he had developed was very good to look at. A rickshaw man's running style is the outward evidence of his ability and his qualifications. The fellow who throws his feet around, slapping them at the ground as if they were a pair of rush-leaf fans, is without any doubt a beginner who has just arrived in town from his village. Those whose heads are bowed very low, whose feet scrape along the ground, and who have all the appearance of running although their pace is actually not much faster than a walk, are the old ones, over fifty. There are also those whose experience is ten parts complete but who are without much strength—they have still another way. With their chests drawn in and their shoulders thrown forward, they lean far forward and lift their knees very high, ducking their heads with each step, so that they give the impression that they are running very hard, while as a matter of fact they are not moving a bit faster than any one else: they depend solely on appearances to maintain their "face."

Naturally Happy Boy would never choose such a carriage. His legs were long and his stride was big; with exceptionally sound thighs, he ran almost noiselessly, every step elastic, and the shafts of the rickshaw absolutely steady, so that the passenger would feel at ease and comfortable. When it came to stopping, he had only to scrape his big feet lightly along the ground for two or three paces, and no matter how fast he might have been running he could come to a standstill; it was as if his strength reached every part of the rickshaw he was pulling. With his back bent forward a little, his two hands loosely gripping the shafts of the rickshaw, he was alive, facile, sure; and though he showed no sign of haste, he was yet a very fast runner—fast and with no risk for his fare. Even among the pullers of private rickshaws this would be regarded as worthy of honor.

He changed his rickshaw for a new one. On the day that he made the change, he inquired carefully and discovered that a rickshaw like the new one he was renting, with soft springs, bright brass work, a rain cover for the top and a curtain for the front, two lamps, and a long-throated brass horn, was worth something over one hundred dollars. If the lacquering and the brass work were a little carelessly finished, then you could get it for a hundred dollars. Speaking generally,

then, he need only have a hundred dollars to buy himself a rickshaw. Suddenly he thought to himself: if he could save ten cents every day, it would only take a thousand days to save a hundred dollars. A thousand days! When he thought of a thousand days all together, he could hardly figure out how far away the farthest was, but he made up his mind—a thousand days or ten thousand days, he had to buy his own rickshaw.

He thought the thing out to himself, and he could see that the first thing was for him to become the rickshaw man in a private family. If he ran into a master who had many friends, and went out often to dinner, there might be in an average month as many as ten dinners, and he would get two or three dollars extra in food tips from his master's hosts without any extra work. If he added to that the eighty cents or a dollar he could save from his wages, he might have three or four or even five dollars, and in a year he could save fifty or sixty. In this way his hope seemed much closer and more easily realizable. He did not smoke or drink or gamble, and he had no weakness of any kind. He was not tied down by a family, and if only he himself were willing to grit his teeth, there was nothing he could not do. He made an oath to himself: in a year and a half he would have his own rickshaw, whatever happened. It must be a new one, not an old one built over.

Happy Boy did in fact become the rickshaw man in a private family, but the actualities were not always an aid to his hopes. There was no mistake about it: he had gritted his teeth but by the end of a year and a half he had not made good his oath. It was true that he had become a private rickshaw puller and had been very careful not to do anything that would cost him his job, but unfortunately the affairs of this world are not simple. He thought only of doing his work carefully, but his masters were not prevented on that account from firing him. Sometimes it was two or three months, and sometimes perhaps only eight or ten days, and then his job would be gone as suddenly as a candle-light goes out when you blow on it, and he would have to hunt again for another employer. Naturally he had, on the one hand, to haul fares while, on the other, he was looking for a job; he was riding a horse in search of a horse, and he had no time for leisure.

In times like these he often made mistakes. He was forcing his energy because he could not make enough each day to fill his stomach for the day: he had to continue saving his money to buy himself his rickshaw. But forcing your energy is never a good thing to do. When he was pulling a rickshaw he could not keep his mind on the job and run straight along: it was as if he was always thinking of something, and the more he thought the more afraid and upset he became. Suppose things were always like this, when would he ever be able to buy his rickshaw? Why were things like this? Could anybody say that he wasn't trying to improve himself? Then his thoughts would become confused, he would forget his usual carefulness, and one of the rubber tires of the rickshaw would run over bits of twisted brass or broken crockery and when the tube blew out there would be a sound like a firecracker exploding. The only thing to do then would be to return the rickshaw to the shed from which he had rented it. Even more serious, he would sometimes run into people walking in the street, and there was one time when he was in such a hurry to get over a crossing that his rickshaw got run into and the whole covering was smashed. If he had been working as a rickshaw man in a private family these things could not have happened, but whenever he lost a job like that he was terribly unhappy and would go about in a kind of a daze. When he got into an accident and damaged a rented rickshaw he naturally had to pay for repairs: that made him more hot and burnt-up than ever, like a fire on which kerosene is poured. Because of his fear that he might get into even greater difficulties, he would sometimes, out of sheer vexation, sleep the whole day away. Then when he opened his eyes the hours would already be gone for nothing, and he would be filled with regret and hatred for himself.

There was another thing: in these periods of anxiety and fear, the more frightened he got, the more he subjected himself to hardship, and the less regularity there was in his eating and drinking. He thought that he was made of iron but actually he too could be sick. Once sick, he was unwilling to spend the money to buy medicine and would stubbornly hold out against his illness. The result would be that he would get sicker and sicker, and would finally not only have to buy medicine but also to rest for many days together. These difficulties only made

试读结束，需要全本PDF请购买 www.ertongbook.com

him clench his teeth more grimly and work the harder, but the money with which to buy his rickshaw did not collect any more rapidly on that account.

Just exactly three years had passed by the time he had saved a hundred dollars.

He could wait no longer. The original plan had been to buy the most completely equipped, the most modern, the most desirable of rickshaws, but now the best he could do would be to speak within the one hundred dollars. By good fortune there was a rickshaw that had just been built, but the man who had ordered it now had no money with which to take delivery of it. It was not very different from the rickshaw of which Happy Boy had dreamed, and originally it was worth more than a hundred but because the down-payment had been forfeited the rickshaw shop was willing to accept a little less than its value. Happy Boy's face was flushed red, and his hand shook. He brought out ninety-six dollars.

"I want this rickshaw." The master of the shop hoped to force him up to a round number and talked endlessly, pulling the rickshaw out and pushing it back again, putting the top of it up and letting it down again, sounding the horn, and with each motion producing the most beautiful adjectives to match the action; and finally he kicked the steel spokes of one of the wheels. "Listen to that sound! It's like a bell! Pull the rickshaw away with you—pull it until it falls apart, and if one spoke comes loose you can bring the cart back and throw it in my face! One hundred dollars! One penny less and we snuff out the deal."

Happy Boy counted his money once more. "I want this rickshaw. Ninety-six dollars." The shopkeeper knew he was up against a person with sense. He eyed the money and he eyed Happy Boy, and sighed. "For the sake of making a friend, the rickshaw is yours. I guarantee it for six months, and unless you smash up the frame of it I'll make repairs on it for you for nothing. Here's the guarantee—take it."

Happy Boy's hands trembled even more. He grasped the guarantee, and pulled the rickshaw out of the shop, feeling as if he wanted to cry. He drew it along to a secluded spot where he could go over it—his own rickshaw—with minute care, and could look at his own face in

the bright polish of its lacquer, as if he were looking in a mirror. The more he looked at the rickshaw the more he loved it; even the things in which it did not quite come up to his expectations he could now overlook, because it was already his own rickshaw. He looked at it so long that he felt tired and sat down on the carpeted footrest, his eyes on the burnished yellow brass of the horn on the shaft.

Suddenly he remembered that this year he was twenty-two years old. Because his mother and father had both died early, he could not remember the date of his birth, and since he had come to the city he had not celebrated his birthday. Well, then, he would count today, the day on which he had bought his new rickshaw, as his birthday: both his and the rickshaw's. That would be easy to remember, and since he had bought the rickshaw with the sweat of his heart, there was actually no reason why he should not count it as part of himself.

How would he celebrate this double birthday? Happy Boy had his plan: his first fare must be a well-dressed person and must on no account be a woman. The best thing would be a passenger to be taken to the South Gate, or to the Market of Eastern Peace. When he got there, he should properly go to the best food stall he could find and buy himself a meal of hot rolls with roasted mutton—or something like that. When he had finished, if he chanced on another good fare or two he would take them, but if not he would put his rickshaw up for the night. That would be his birthday celebration.

From the day Happy Boy got his rickshaw life became more and more interesting. He could rent out his services by the month or he could pick up fares one by one: he need no longer worry about the rental money at the end of the day. All he earned in fares was all his own. Easy in his own heart, he was more than ever friendly to other people, and his business was because of that more than ever to his liking. When he had had his own rickshaw for six months, his hopes were even greater: if he could keep up at this rate, he need work only two years longer—not more than two—and he would be able to buy another rickshaw, and then another. In no time he would be opening a rickshaw shed!

But most bright hopes come to strange and bitter endings, and Happy Boy's were no exception to the rule.

II

BECAUSE OF his high spirits, Happy Boy lost some of his temerity: after he had bought his own rickshaw he ran even faster than before. Naturally he was particularly careful with a rickshaw that was his own property, but when he looked at himself and then at it he felt that it wouldn't be quite right for him not to run as fast as he could.

He had grown over an inch in height since he had come to the city and he felt as if he would grow even taller. It was true that his features had settled a little, and that he had the beginnings of a mustache on his upper lip, but he still felt that he should grow a little more. When he walked through the door of some little room or some low gateway, and he had to duck his head way down to get through, he would be happy in his own heart, even though he said nothing. The fact that he was already so tall and big while he was still growing made it seem as if he was at once a full-grown man and still a child: it was a lot of fun to be that way.

A fellow as big as that, pulling a rickshaw as beautiful as his rickshaw was—his own rickshaw, with soft springs bouncing as he went along, so that even the shafts shook a little in his hands, with the back of the seat so brightly polished, the cushion so white, and the horn so loud—if he just dragged along and didn't run fast, how could he face himself? How could he face his rickshaw? This was not a false pride but rather a sense of responsibility. If he didn't fly along he would not be showing his own strength nor the excellence of his rickshaw. He could find no words to say these things, but they were in his heart and he could not do other than follow his feelings about them.

For this rickshaw of his was really lovable. By the time he had had it six months it was as if every part of it was alive and had feelings of its own. Whenever Happy Boy leaned to one side or the other, or bent his knees, or stood erect, his rickshaw would answer him at once, giving him the most suitable assistance that it could. There was not the least

barrier between them, and no contrariness one to the other. When he came to places where the road was smooth and the people few, Happy Boy needed to use only one hand to hold the shafts, and the light sound of the rubber tires on the gravel behind him, like a favorable wind, would carry him along evenly and at a flying speed. When he had reached the address of his fare, his clothes would be dripping with sweat, as if they had just come out of the wash. He would feel tired but very happy—a kind of tiredness of which he could be proud, as if he had ridden a famous horse for several tens of li.

Granted that fearlessness and carelessness are different things, Happy Boy was anything but careless in the brave way he sped along with his rickshaw. If running slow would make him unable to face his fare, running fast and wrecking his rickshaw would leave him unable to face himself. His rickshaw was his life, and he knew how to be careful of it. With courage and care together, he became more and more self-confident: he was firmly convinced that both himself and his rickshaw were made of iron.

Thus he was not only not afraid to run fast, he no longer worried about the hours which he worked. He felt that to earn his rice by pulling a rickshaw was the most independent thing in the world. When he wanted to go out, no one could stop him. He did not take very much to heart the rumors that he heard outside; he could not be bothered with all the talk about soldiers coming back to the Western Gardens, or the fighting at Ch'ang Hsin Tien, or the conscripting of men outside the Western Gate of Forthrightness, or the Gate of Uniform Transformation's being already closed for half a day. Naturally the stores would have put up their shutters and closed their doors, and the streets would be full of armed police and members of the Peace Preservation Corps. He could not go hunting for trouble, and like everybody else he would put up his rickshaw as quickly as he could, but as for the rumors themselves he did not believe them. He knew how to be prudent, especially since his rickshaw was his own, but down underneath he was still a countryman, and not like the city people, who claimed it was raining whenever they heard the wind. Besides that, his size gave him confidence: if by some bad luck he should find himself "on the spot," he could certainly find some way out, so that he would not be

likely to suffer too much loss. As tall as he was, and with such broad shoulders, it wouldn't be easy to take advantage of him.

News of war and rumors of conflict grew up each year in the springtime with the growing wheat, and for the Northerner the full ripe kernel was the symbol of his hopes, as the glistening bayonet the omen of his fears. Happy Boy's rickshaw was six months old just at that season when the new wheat needs the rains of spring. Spring rains are not sure to fall when the people hope for them, but war comes anyway, regardless of whether or not anyone wants it.

Whether the rumors were only rumors or actual facts, Happy Boy seemed to have forgotten that he had been a farmer; he did not think of how fighting ruins the farmlands, and paid no heed to whether the spring rains had come or not. He only thought of his rickshaw. It could produce hot rolls and steaming rice and all his other food for him. It was a plot of soil in which anything could be grown, and which very conveniently followed him around; a piece of precious, living farmland. Because there had been a scarcity of rain and also because of the reports of fighting, all kinds of food went up in price: this much Happy Boy knew. But he was like the city people—he could only complain about the price of food, without having any plan for doing anything about it. Food was dear. Well, then, it was dear. Who had the means of making it cheap? This attitude made him think only of his own livelihood, putting all calamities and disasters out of his mind.

If the city people were without any means of helping themselves, they could at least invent wild rumors. Sometimes they made them up out of nothing at all, and sometimes they started with one part of truth and talked it into ten parts of fancy, all to prove that they were neither stupid nor idle. They were like a school of little fish that have nothing better to do than put their mouths close to the surface of the water and amuse themselves mightily by blowing useless bubbles. Among false rumors the most interesting are those about war: other false rumors end up only as false rumors, like telling stories about devils and fairy-foxes: no matter how much you tell about them, they won't really appear. But as for rumors of war, the very lack of reliable news makes it possible for the wildest of stories to turn suddenly into fact. In small details there may be very great discrepancies between rumor and truth,

but when it comes to the question as to whether fighting has broken out, rumor is eight or nine parts reliable.

"There's going to be war!" Whenever this sentence is spoken, you may be sure that sooner or later there will be war. As for who is to fight whom and why, each man will have a different answer. Happy Boy knew all this well enough. But although rickshaw men cannot welcome war, still they may not lose by its coming. Each time there has been war, it has been the rich who were most frightened. When the wind of rumor rises, they think at once of running for their lives; their money brings them to a place quickly, but it makes them the first to run from it when danger threatens. They can't run by themselves—their feet and legs are laden down too heavily with their money. They must hire people to act as their legs; there must be people to carry their boxes; there must be rickshaws to haul men and women, old and young; at such a time the hands and feet of the brethren who sell their labor become more expensive. "The Gate Before"—"The East Station"—"Where?"—"The East Station"—"Oh—give me a dollar and forty cents—there's no use talking price—there'll be fighting here soon!"

It was in conditions like these that Happy Boy took a fare outside the city wall. Rumors had been current for over ten days and prices had all gone up, but the fighting seemed a long way off, and not likely to reach Peking in any very short while. Happy Boy was pulling his rickshaw as usual, unwilling to sneak two or three days of lazying around just because of a few rumors. One day, when he had run his rickshaw to the western part of the city, he saw there many signs of trouble. Neither at the mouth of the Road of the Temple for the Defense of the State nor at the New Road Gate was there a single rickshaw man calling for fares to the Western Gardens or Ch'ing Hua University. Near the New Road Gate he strolled about for a while. Someone told him that rickshaws no longer dared venture outside the city, that outside the Western Gate of Forthrightness everything on wheels was being seized—wagons, pushcarts, mule-carts, and rickshaws. He decided to take a cup of tea and then go back to the southern part of the city to put away his rickshaw. The emptiness of the street

试读结束，需要全本PDF请购买 www.ertongbook.com