

## 儒林外史（节选） 吴敬梓

这人姓王名冕，在诸暨县乡村里住。七岁上死了父亲，他母亲做些针指，供给他到村学堂里去读书。看看三个年头，王冕已是十岁了。

母亲唤他到面前来说道：“儿阿，不是我有心要耽误你，只因你父亲亡后，我一个寡妇人家，只有出去的，没有进来的；年岁不好，柴米又贵；这几件旧衣服和些旧家伙，当的当了，卖的卖了；只靠着我替人家做些针指生活寻来的钱，如何供得你读书？如今没奈何，把你雇在间壁人家放牛，每月可以得他几钱银子，你又有现成饭吃，只在明日就要去了。”

王冕道：“娘说的是。我在学堂里坐着，心里也闷，不如往他家放牛倒快活些。假如我要读书，依旧可以带几本去读。”当夜商议定了。

第二日，母亲同他到间壁秦老家。秦老留着他母子两个吃了早饭，牵出一条水牛来交与王冕，指着门外道：“就在我这大门过去两箭之地便是七泖湖。湖边一带绿草，各家的牛都在那里打睡。又有几十棵合抱的垂杨树，十分阴凉。牛要渴了，就在湖边上饮水。小哥，你只在这一带玩耍，不必远去。我老汉每日两餐小菜饭是不少的，每日早上，还折两个钱与你买点心吃。只是百事勤谨些，休嫌怠慢。”

他母亲谢了扰要回家去，王冕送出门来。母亲替他理理衣服，口里说道：“你在此须要小心，休惹人说不是。早出晚归，免我悬望。”王冕应诺，母亲含着两眼眼泪去了。

## The Scholars (Excerpt)

His name was Wang Mian, and he lived in a village in Zhuji County in Zhejiang. When he was seven his father died, but his mother took in sewing so that he could study at the village school. Soon three years had passed and Wang Mian was ten.

His mother called him to her and said, "Son, it's not that I want to stand in your way. But since your father died and left me a widow, I have had nothing coming in. Times are hard, and fuel and rice are expensive. Our old clothes and our few sticks of furniture have been pawned or sold. We have nothing to live on but what I make by my sewing. How can I pay for your schooling? There's nothing for it but to set you to work looking after our neighbor's buffalo. You'll be making a little money every month, and you'll get your meals there too. You start tomorrow."

"Yes, mother," said Wang Mian. "I find sitting in school boring anyway. I'd rather look after buffaloes. If I want to study, I can take a few books along to read." So that very night the matter was decided.

The next morning his mother took him to the Qin family next door. Old Qin gave them some breakfast, and when they had finished he led out a water buffalo and made it over to Wang Mian. "Two bow shots from my gate is the lake," he said, pointing outside. "And by the lake is a belt of green where all the buffaloes of the village browse. There are a few dozen big willows there too, so that it is quiet, shady and cool, and if the buffalo is thirsty it can drink at the water's edge. You can play there, son; but don't wander off. I shall see that you get rice and vegetables twice a day, and each morning I shall give you a few coppers to buy a snack to eat while you're out. Only you must work well. I hope you'll find this satisfactory."

Wang Mian's mother thanked Old Qin and turned to go home. Her son saw her to the gate, and there she straightened his clothes for him. "Mind now, don't give them any reason to find fault with you," she charged him. "Go out early and come back at dusk. I don't want to have to worry about you." Wang Mian nodded assent. Then, with tears in her eyes, she left him.