



*Routledge Studies in the Modern History of Japan*

# **WRITING MANCHURIA: THE LIVES AND LITERATURE OF ZHU TI AND LI ZHENGZHONG**

Norman Smith



# Writing Manchuria: The Lives and Literature of Zhu Ti and Li Zhengzhong

*Writing Manchuria* details the lives and translates a selection of fiction from one of the mid-twentieth century's "four famous husband-wife writers" of China's Northeast, who lived in the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo: Li Zhengzhong (1921–2020) and Zhu Ti (1923–2012).

The writings herein were published from the late 1930s to the mid-1940s, in Manchukuo, north China, and Japan; their writings appeared in the most prominent Japanese-owned, Chinese-language journals and newspapers. This volume includes materials that were censored or banned by the Manchukuo authorities: Li Zhengzhong's "Temptation" and "Frost Flowers," and Zhu Ti's "Cross the Bo Sea" and "Little Linzi and her Family." Li Zhengzhong has been characterized as "an angry youth" while Zhu Ti's work questioned contemporary gender ideals and the subjugation of women. Their writings – those that were censored or banned and those published – shed important light on Japanese imperialism and the Chinese literature that was produced in different regions, reflecting both official support and suppression.

*Writing Manchuria* is the first English-language translation of their writings, and it will appeal to those interested in Chinese wartime literature, as well as contribute to understandings of imperialism and the varied forms it took across Japan's vast war-time empire.

**Norman Smith** is a professor of History at the University of Guelph. His research focuses on the modern history of China's Northeast/Manchuria. His books include two monographs, *Resisting Manchukuo* (2007) and *Intoxicating Manchuria* (2012), and nine edited volumes. His research has been translated into Chinese, Japanese, and Russian.

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相见时难别亦难

**It is hard to meet, harder to part.**

**Li Shangyin (813–858)**

**This book is dedicated to the memory of  
Zhu Ti and Li Zhengzhong**



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# Acknowledgements

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I am greatly saddened that varied responsibilities caused this volume to pause to the extent that Zhu Ti and Li Zhengzhong are not able to hold it in their hands. I hope that somewhere, sometime, somehow, someday they know it is done. And that I miss them, enormously.

One person has consistently, insistently lauded the study of these writers and their writings: my greatest mentor, Diana Lary. To her I will remain ever grateful, for teaching me the skills of a historian, the importance of learning from the past, as painful as it may be, and the virtue of being kind. Bless, Diana.



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**Part I**

# **Lives and Literature**



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# 1 Historical Setting

Manchuria, or the Northeast of China as it is now called, is a land of human diversity and environmental wealth that has for decades been characterized, if it is thought of at all, as little more than a cultural wasteland and a rust belt. But Manchuria was the homeland of the last rulers of Imperial China, the Manchus, and their Jurchen ancestors who had ruled the Han Chinese centuries before. The Manchus were the dominant ethnic group there and they sought to keep Manchuria safe for its Indigenous peoples through imperial decree and the use of obstacles such as the Great Wall and the Willow Palisade (*liutiao bian*), a pattern of ditches and willow trees designed to warn migrants off. Yet the Han, Koreans, Japanese, Russians, Europeans, and other migrants, viewed Manchuria as a “virgin” land, unsettled and ripe for the taking. But it was over two thousand years ago that the First Emperor, Qin Shi Huang (First Emperor of Qin, 259–210 BCE), deployed an army of engineers, soldiers, and slaves to construct the Great Wall, affixing what he believed would be a permanent border between the “China proper” of the Han Chinese who he unified for the first time, and the so-called “barbarians” beyond. The Wall long functioned as a divide separating the heartland of China from its northern neighbors. For much of that time, the Chinese phrase “Beyond the Pass” (*guanwai*) was one of the names applied to the non-Han lands lying beyond the Wall’s northern and easternmost “Mountain-Sea Pass,” Shanhaiguan. However, that Wall could not save “China” from conquest by foreign dynasties: the Khitan Great Liao (916–1125), Jurchen Great Jin (1115–1234), Mongol Great Yuan (1279–1368), or the Manchu Great Qing (1644–1912). Non-Han northern peoples ruled China proper for half of the last millennium and, in fact, it was only the last, non-Han dynasty that gave the People’s Republic of China (PRC) the geographical shape that it has today.

In the mid-1600s, the Manchus crossed through the Mountain-Sea Pass to China proper, overthrowing the Han Great Ming (1368–1644) to proclaim their Great Qing. The conquest took three decades of determined efforts by the early Qing emperors who sought to rule over the Han while hoping to keep their sacred Manchu homelands sequestered. Limited numbers of the Han who numerically dominated the empire south of the Wall were permitted to migrate north. From the mid-1600s to the early 1700s, the Kangxi emperor (r. 1661–1722), perhaps the greatest of the Great Qing emperors, envisioned himself a paragon of Han Chinese

Confucian ideals yet followed his Manchu predecessors' ambitions to limit Han migration to his ancestors' lands with the aim of keeping the region and its peoples more "Man" than "Han."

For much of the Great Qing, Manchuria remained peaceful, although the 1858 Treaty of Aigun and the 1860 Convention of Beijing forfeited to Russia a staggering 2,000,000 miles of land once considered constituent parts of the Manchu homelands;<sup>1</sup> curiously, except for a brief period in the 1960s, the rulers of the PRC have not clamored for the return of this enormous landmass as they did in the 1980s with the much smaller territories of Hong Kong and Macao. At the end of the nineteenth century, Manchuria was pushed to the front of momentous international events. In 1894 and 1895, the Japanese and Qing empires engaged in a war that the Qing lost, badly – resulting in a punishing indemnity that helped Japan modernize and prepare for even more devastating warfare against its Asian neighbors. In 1899, the devastating Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901) broke out in north China in response to drought and the ever-growing, overbearing, foreign presence. The Boxers aimed to expel all foreigners, especially missionaries, from China. On 21 June 1900, after foreign troops from eight imperialist nations began a deadly fight from the north China coast to the capital, the Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908) famously declared “war on the world.” Again, the Great Qing met with absolute, shocking defeat. Beijing was occupied and sacked, and senior members of the imperial family, including the emperor and empress, fled for their very lives. Russian troops poured over Manchuria's borders and even after peace was secured the Russians remained. In 1904 and 1905, Japan battled Russia in Manchuria. Russia's devastating loss to Japan pushed the Romanov Dynasty (1613–1917) further toward its bloody end. The Japanese wrested control over hundreds of miles of very expensive Russian-built railway tracks and infrastructure, and then established a formal colony on the southernmost tip of Manchuria. The Russian city of Dal'nii became the Japanese city of Dairen (today's Chinese Dalian). To further curb Russian influence in the region, Korea was forcibly made a protectorate of Japan in 1905 and, in 1910, a formal Japanese colony.

Defeating the seemingly “Western Great Power” Russia made Japan appear a powerful Asian model of modernity in the first decade of the twentieth century, as the Qing empire was falling into decay. Thousands of Chinese students travelled abroad in the aughts especially to Japan, but also to the USA and Europe. There, they were exposed to foreign political ideologies and cultures that spelled the end for the Qing. In the final years of the dynasty, the Father of Modern China, Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), who rejected the Manchus as foreigners in China, even contemplated a lucrative lease or sale of Manchuria to Japan, whose leaders began to envision the region as a lifeline for their future, a bulwark against Russian and Soviet expansionism. In 1912, the Qing child emperor Xuantong (r. 1908–1912), the boy emperor Aixinjueluo Henry Puyi (1906–1967), abdicated. In 1916, central control over China utterly collapsed with the death of the Republic of China's (ROC, established in 1912) strongman president, Yuan Shikai (1859–1916), subjecting the fractured empire to a wide range of warlords. Violence raged as weaponry remaining from the end of the Great War (1914–1918) poured into China. One of the more ambitious and capable Han Chinese warlords, Zhang Zuolin

(1875–1928), took Manchuria as his own.<sup>2</sup> At this time, from the late teens into the early twenties, the May Fourth/New Culture movement (circa 1917–1926) swept across China, inspiring new understandings of self and nation. As warlord fought warlord, young activists decried traditional Confucian ideals as a major element in China’s national weakness. Japan, too, was denounced for its leaders’ imperialist activities and unwanted intrusions onto the Asian mainland.

By the 1920s, China’s rulers had done an about-face regarding the future of Manchuria and sought to expand and make permanent their own control over the region. Millions of Han migrants poured in, seeking sustenance as the fledgling ROC sought to bring Manchuria permanently into its realm.<sup>3</sup> From 1926 to 1928, some five million migrants left the impoverished northern provinces of Shandong, Hebei and others for Manchuria, adding significantly to the region’s population of 15 million.<sup>4</sup> Rising numbers of Han in the region, and efforts by the region’s ruler Zhang to more closely link Manchuria to the ROC, led to his 4 June 1928 assassination by Japanese militants. Three years later, on 18 September 1931, Japanese military officers triggered an invasion to protect Japan’s long-standing and substantial interests in the region. On 1 March 1932, Manchuria was formally declared Manchukuo – literally the “country of Manchuria.” Later that year, the League of Nation’s half-hearted condemnation of Japan’s aggressive invasion of Manchuria became a prominent cause of that international institution’s demise. Claiming to restore sovereignty to the Manchus and other ethnic groups, in 1934 the Chief Executive Puyi was crowned emperor and Manchukuo was renamed Manchutikuo (Manzhoudiguo) – the Manchurian Empire. But no matter how officials tried to dress that empire up, their harsh, racist policies deflated whatever legitimacy the regime’s early leaders sought.

The lofty aspirations of the regime were enshrined in the quasi-Confucian concept of *Wangdao* (Kingly Way), which was promoted as an alternative to the nationalism, republicanism, and communism that its founders feared threatened East Asia.<sup>5</sup> A Confucian “return to tradition” was to challenge long-standing warlord rule, to create a “golden mean between ... fascism and bolshevism” with the support of an array of Japanese militants, intellectuals, and political and business elites, and more than a few former citizens of the ROC.<sup>6</sup> Thus was born a Japanese anti-colonial colonialism, to drive Western powers out of Asia and replace them with the Japanese, as the “leading race.” State propaganda expounded conservative, Confucian-based ideals of loyalty and benevolence within a context of modern life and education that was envisioned to empower the regime and distinguish it from China proper. Local society had been deeply influenced by the New Culture/May Fourth movements and the regime sought to harness criticisms of warlord rule and establish what historian Prasenjit Duara has described as “tradition within modernity.”<sup>7</sup> Officials trumpeted policies such as “Harmony of the Five Races” (Ch.: *wu zu xiehe*; Jp.: *gozoku kyōwa*) in a bid to legitimize their experiment of creating a peaceful, multi-ethnic society composed primarily of the so-called five races: Han, Japanese, Manchus, Mongolians, and Koreans; Russians were originally included, but were soon dropped from the group.

In 1945, Japan’s loss in World War Two (1939–1945), and the immediate dissolution of Manchukuo with it, re-ignited a Chinese civil war (1945–1949) that



eventuated with a totalitarian Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime. Manchuria was rebranded, again, as a non-negotiable “Northeast” (*Dongbei*) of China. The CCP issued restricted, internal (*neibu*) directives banning cadre use of the word “Manchuria” and any derivative of it.<sup>8</sup> The CCP dictated that the region’s Japanese imperialist intrusions were best condemned or left forgotten. Public memories of the puppet state were forced into limited, highly critical historical narratives that remain a tension in Sino-Japanese relations to this day. For decades, imperialist competitions, the desire to forget painful pasts, and CCP determination to forge a singular, united *Chinese* nation resulted in the suppression of most domestic scholarly inquiry into modern Manchurian history. But since the 1980s, greater interest in regional history, and increasing recognition of the political distortions of the modern history of “China,” have raised questions regarding relations between China proper and its so-called peripheries, or borderlands, like Manchuria, East Turkistan, and Tibet.

Manchuria’s past importance is undeniable, as recognized in 1888 by the British Indian civil servant, explorer, and author Sir Henry Evan Murchison James (1846–1923):

As the scene of a great conflict in the past, for supremacy over Eastern Asia, and perhaps of a still greater in the future, Manchuria merits alike the attention of historical students and contemporary statesmen.<sup>9</sup>

In the first half of the twentieth century, the region was considered a “powder keg,”<sup>10</sup> or “the cockpit of Asia,”<sup>11</sup> due to the imperialist ambitions of the Great Powers. Many had vested interests in the area. Each battled for control over the landmass twice the size of France. The vast land, and its considerable human and natural resources, made it a magnet for imperialist states as well as economic migrants. At the start of the Japanese occupation (1931–1945), Manchuria’s population stood at 30 million. Throughout the Chinese War of Resistance Against Japan (1937–1945), the region’s relative stability encouraged population growth to around 45 million – a 50% increase. In recent years, with around 10% of China’s population – over 100 million people – residing there, interest in the historical and current significance of the region is rising.<sup>12</sup> Despite the current regime’s crack-down on “sensitive” historical issues such as Manchukuo, outside of China interest has not been so high since China’s civil war.

This book is an examination and translation of Chinese literary production in the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo, through the lives and work of one of the region’s most celebrated literary couples, Li Zhengzhong (1921–2019)<sup>13</sup> and Zhu Ti (whose name was Zhang Xingjuan, 1923–2012),<sup>14</sup> who together comprise one couple of the “Northeast’s four famous husband–wife writers” (*Dongbei si da zhiming fufu zuojia*): with Liu Longguang (1911–1949) and Mei Niang (1916–2013);<sup>15</sup> Shan Ding (1914–1995) and Zuo Di (1920–1976); and Wu Lang (1911–1968) and Wu Ying (1915–1961).<sup>16</sup> These four couples of writers are representative of Manchuria’s youth in the early to mid-twentieth century who sought love matches with similarly educated spouses. The literary world that Li joined in the 1930s and Zhu in the early 1940s was structured by two momentous events in modern Asian

history: the New Culture/May Fourth Movement and the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Both impacted heavily on their lives: May Fourth promoted the voices of youth, criticism of China's "traditional" culture, and an awareness of the ability of literature, especially social realism, to induce socio-political change while Japanese occupation contoured both their personal and professional lives by structuring their education and providing them work opportunities and venues for literary production. They published their writings in Manchuria and beyond, in Beijing,<sup>17</sup> Shanghai, and in the trans-Asian Japanese-owned, Chinese-language journal, *Huawen Daban meiri* [Chinese Osaka daily]. Their lives and careers reflect the major events of modern northeast Asian history. Their writings reveal their perspectives – and critiques – of life in one of the most historically contested parts of modern China.

### The Li Family

In China proper, establishment of the Great Qing involved Han accommodation to the new rulers from beyond the pass. In Shandong, the northern native province of Confucius (551–479 BCE), Manchu rule was established rather quickly. The new regime did not, however, necessarily bring prosperity to all. Early in the Kangxi reign, in the county of Weigu, in Guti village, a family by the surname of Li struggled to squeeze a living from the land.<sup>18</sup> The population was dense and the environment unforgiving. In the 1660s, particularly hard years fell upon Guti village. The Li family – father, mother, and son – could no longer make ends meet. Desperate to survive rather than starve to death, Mingshan, the only son, started off on foot to escape the grinding poverty. Getting by on his wits and the sweat of his brow, Mingshan took on odd jobs here and there, working and earning his way to where he knew not. Days turned into months. Months turned into one year. Then two. He kept working and walking, and eventually he found himself at the Mountain-Sea Pass through which the Manchus two decades earlier had descended upon the Ming. He ventured through the Pass and kept going – north, then east, and then north again.

Almost 450 miles later, Mingshan arrived in what is now western Jilin province at a county named Yitong, a Sinicized Manchu word meaning "Big River." Yitong is the origin of the Eastern Liao River, a tributary of the Liao, one of China's seven main river systems, locally known as "mother river." Yitong was then home to a predominantly Manchu population; today, it is a "Manchu autonomous county." For two years, Mingshan had labored for strangers before arriving at a county peopled by the Great Qing's native-place kinfolk, who were forbidden to engage in labor such as farming. Although the emperors and Qing officials sought to restrict Han migration to Manchuria, many Manchus were happy to hire the incoming Han laborers who farmed their land and made them profits. Mingshan was but one among many. Hundreds of miles away from his native Shandong, he set down roots and eventually saved enough money to afford a bride. She gave birth to a baby boy who carried the Li name into posterity. For Mingshan, the poverty of Shandong was a thing of the past and so, too, were his relatives who remained there. The Great Wall, the Willow Palisade, and hundreds of miles

inhibited on-going communication as the Lis settled in Yitong. Like his parents, Mingshan and his wife had only one son – but that son and his wife had four sons, establishing a family tree with substantial roots that have lasted to the present.

Through tranquility and turmoil, to the late 1800s, the Li family passed, generation after generation. The late nineteenth century saw the birth of the ninth paternal descendent of Mingshan, a man named Li Shengchun (1894–1974). Shengchun dreamt of a life freed from the precarious dangers of working the land. Eight generations of the Li family had farmed Manchuria's land and he was not prepared to replicate such a destiny. Studying hard, Shengchun won a tuition-free seat among the first generation of male students to graduate from the prestigious Jilin Middle School, which had been founded on 16 February 1907 by Wang Wenshan (1844–1918), a native of Yushu (Elm Trees) county, Jilin province. Wang is a major figure in modern Jilin history, having been involved in local education since the 1870s. Following abolition of China's traditional imperial examination system in 1905, Wang became a pioneer of modern education in Manchuria. Contemporaries considered Wang “old-fashioned and heavy-duty, but useful.”<sup>19</sup> In his role as an advocate for modern education, he served in various capacities: as principal of the Elm Trees Academy, Jilin Middle School, and the Jilin Chongwen (Esteem the Arts) Mountain Academy; and he served as president of the Jilin Provincial Education Association. Just four months after founding Jilin Middle School, Wang resigned on 21 June 1907, for work as a gentry judge and as chair of the Jilin Provincial Education Association. On 23 May 1908, he supervised establishment of Jilin Province Women's Normal School, a first-rate teacher-training institution from which Zhu Ti would subsequently graduate. During the first year of operation, it was so difficult to recruit female students to the modern school that Wang and several teachers went door to door pleading with parents to allow their daughters to receive an education that would prepare them for what was increasingly seen as an especially appropriate career for women – teaching. Wang's final formal position was director of Jilin Provincial Library. Wang may have had an “old-fashioned and heavy-duty” character, but he proved very productive – establishing and overseeing institutions that changed countless thousands of lives and anchored Manchuria ever more tightly to the cultural firmament of China proper, through its writing and culture, in which the self-identities of Li Zhengzhong and Zhu Ti began to take shape in the 1920s.<sup>20</sup>

After completing two years of education at Jilin Middle School, with a head full of dreams, Li Shengchun began teaching in a small county school in Yitong and married Wei Shuzhi (1897–1955) the daughter of a doctor who lived in Jilin City. He earned just enough to support himself, his wife and, eventually, his son – Zhengzhong, the tenth-generation paternal descendent of Mingshan. As a graduate of one of Manchuria's most prestigious schools, Shengchun left the land and neither he nor his family would go back to it until their persecution by the CCP during the tortuous Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) that banished them for a decade to the impoverished mountains of southwest Liaoning province. Through his childhood, Zhengzhong followed faithfully in his father's footsteps – pursuing his father's love of learning and writing. Shengchun viewed calligraphy as a means

of communication, a skill, and an art. Calligraphy would shape Zhengzhong's life even more than it did his father's.

Li Zhengzhong (henceforth, Li) was born in 1921, on the sixteenth day of the fourth month in the lunar calendar, in Lingxi village, Yidanjia (currently Yidanzhen), Yitong county.<sup>21</sup> There, his father Shengchun's modest teaching income was supplemented by his mother Shuzhi's earnings from doing needlework and sewing at home for others. The small family earned enough to get by but, when necessary, Shuzhi's parents helped them. The precarious economic status of a teacher pressured Li's parents to have only one child, as they did not believe that they had the resources required to properly raise more. Li's mother loved poetry and she recited Tang Dynasty (618–907) poetry to him when he was a child, instilling in him a life-long love of classical Chinese literature. Li also enjoyed listening to stories about Ni Yunlin (also known as Ni Zan, 1301–1374), one of the Four Masters of painting during the Mongol Great Yuan Dynasty. Ni was a Han Chinese painter who famously gave away all of his wealth and left his home province of Jiangsu to travel in the south during the Yuan's final years. During his travels, he developed a distinctive style of minimalist landscape painting that has inspired Chinese painters to this day. After the collapse of the Yuan and the re-establishment of Chinese rule, he returned to his native place. Just as Ni Yunlin, Li, too, would learn to live under foreign occupation – and to outlive it.

When Li turned five, his father bought him his first calligraphy copybook, *The Longmen Twenty*, which contains twenty of what are considered among the greatest examples of calligraphy, from the famed Longmen Grottoes, which date to the Northern Wei (386–534) and Tang eras. Li practised with it for ten years, mastering the Wei Kai writing style that emerged during the Southern and Northern dynasties (420–589).<sup>22</sup> When Li was six, his parents decided that the time had come for him to go to school. They had particularly strong feelings about this, and he began his formal education in Jilin Provincial Primary School in 1928. Li boarded at his maternal grandparents' house in Jilin, where he was deeply inspired by his grandfather's calligraphy that adorned the walls. His mother's brother, Wei Jinchun (1902–1948), a left-wing writer and teacher at a middle school in Jilin, often bought or borrowed books and magazines for Li, kindling the boy's love of reading and writing. While Li was in primary school, his father and a relative opened a hotel, the failure of which left the family in further financial difficulty. However, he was deeply influenced by Wei Jinchun, who had stayed at the hotel and read aloud his writings to the great delight of the young Li.<sup>23</sup> In 1930, at nine years of age, Li published his own first written work, “*Xiao Pengyou: Shi zhounian jinian (zhuci)*” [Tenth anniversary of *Little friends* (congratulatory words)] in the Shanghai magazine, *Xiao pengyou* [Little friends].<sup>24</sup> His congratulatory words were awarded a prize and his photograph was published alongside the essay in the magazine.

The early 1930s proved turbulent and transformative. In 1931, Li transferred to Yitong County First Senior Primary School, and he returned to live with his parents. Li pursued his education energetically, unaware at first that he was much poorer than his classmates: while he settled for meals of plain buns at pennies a piece, his classmates ate prepared meals from sellers in front of the school, or even

pricier items from home. Undeterred, Li excelled in his studies. In the immediate aftermath of the Japanese invasion in September 1931, Li's family moved north to Harbin, a city renowned for its Russian population and culture; it was not occupied by the Japanese until early February 1932. In the autumn of 1932, the Li family moved south to Jilin City. Thus, Li began the year studying at Harbin's North Manchuria Special District 23 Middle School and completed it at Jilin First Middle School. At that time, there were three middle schools for young men in Jilin – Jilin First Middle School, Yongji County Middle School, and Yuwen Middle school; at the latter, Principal Li and more than ten teachers distributed anti-Japanese fliers and were arrested.<sup>25</sup> The teachers at Yongji were not as “fiercely rebellious” (*jilie fankang*) as those at Yuwen, yet they also promoted patriotism toward the ROC in their classrooms.<sup>26</sup> In “Class 25 of Jilin Middle School,” Li's education was guided by several prominent intellectuals. In December 1934, Li submitted an article, “Miscellaneous Anecdotes of Li Jinshi,” to the most prestigious newspaper in Manchukuo, the *Datong bao* [Great unity herald], for a New Year essay contest and won a prize.<sup>27</sup>

One influential teacher that Li studied under was Sun Xiaoye (also known as Sun Changxu, 1908–1994), a pioneer of modern Chinese lexicology and a renowned scholar who encouraged Li's creative writing abilities and calligraphy.<sup>28</sup> Sun was the director of Jilin Middle School's library and also taught Chinese language and music lessons, in which he often featured folk-style songs by the Tang poet Li Qi (690–751), such as “Gu congjun xing” [An old war song] that starts with the lines:

Through the bright day up the mountain  
We scan the sky for a war-torch.<sup>29</sup>

Singing the centuries-old song could have a Tang Dynasty appeal for the Japanese with whom he worked and who viewed that period as the high point of Chinese culture, but it could also be interpreted as something officials abhorred – implicit criticism of the militaristic nature of contemporary society. Sun was a major influence on Li as well as on Zhu Ti, as he also taught her at Jilin Provincial Women's National High School.

Another teacher under whom Li studied was Li Wenxin (1903–1982), who is considered a pioneer of Manchuria's archaeological movement, and has been named the “Northeast's Number One Person in Cultural Relics Archaeology” (*Dongbei wenwu kaogu di'yi ren*); he was also later in life the director of Liaoning Provincial Museum.<sup>30</sup> Li Wenxin was considered a rigorous teacher who was noted for wearing a dark, course-textured Western suit with a black bow tie or a straight-collared Sun Yat-sen suit rather than a *changshan* – a long jacket traditionally favoured by teachers – or the even more common Manchukuo Education Ministry-mandated, grass-green uniform of the Concordia Association (*Xiehehui*). The Concordia Association was established in 1931 and the emperor was later named its titular head. It was a fascist party intended to indoctrinate the people with Pan-Asianism and cultivate patriotism for the empire. Li Wenxin offered classes in music and art, often taking students to the banks of the Songhua River,

to draw the lives of those who made their living fishing there. In the 1930s, he also famously conducted archaeological excavations at Xituanshan, a late Bronze Age site in Jilin province, with the Japanese archaeologist and teacher Mikami Tsugio (1907–1987).<sup>31</sup> A “self-taught” archeologist, Li’s writings are still highly respected today and are considered classics in the field; Li Wenxin’s teaching career has to date attracted far less attention than his archaeological activities.

While Li Zhengzhong was in middle school, a teacher approached Li’s parents to marry him to their daughter. The young woman was from a landlord family and her parents tried to seal the deal by offering to send the couple to Japan for advanced studies after their marriage. Li’s parents, however, disapproved of taking money from people who were not relatives and they turned down the proposal. While in his early teens, Li looked forward to studying chemistry or engineering, but his parents steered him toward a career in teaching or law. Economics dictated their decision. Engineering, for example, was a four-year degree program in Harbin, while law or teaching were degrees requiring just three years of study, in institutions closer to home. In 1936, at the age of 15, Li’s decade-long practice of calligraphy was celebrated as Li entered a city-wide calligraphy contest and won, setting him on an artistic venture and a career that would last over eight decades.<sup>32</sup>

## The Zhang Family

Zhu Ti, Li’s bride-to-be, was born in 1923, on the sixteenth day of the third month of the lunar calendar, in Baochi (Hebei province), but spent her first few years in Beijing, a city that had long fared well under Manchu rule as the Qing imperial capital. But major troubles arrived in Beijing in 1860, with British and French occupation of the city, and the looting and destruction of the imperial Summer Palace, the *Yuanming yuan* (Gardens of Perfect Brilliance). Although the palace buildings were decimated, treasures stolen from them can be seen in the most prestigious museums around the world today; the Chinese government estimates that 1.5 million items were stolen in the three-day-long rampage by 3,000 soldiers.<sup>33</sup> The British were so proud of their achievement that when a Pekinese dog stolen from the Summer Palace was presented to Queen Victoria (1819–1901), she named the dog “Looty”; the dog had reputedly belonged to the Empress Xiaozhenxian (1837–1881) – subsequently known as one of the two Empresses Dowager, Ci’an. Contemporary British museums featuring the looted treasures proudly labelled them: “From the Summer Palace of the Emperor of China.”<sup>34</sup> Remains of the palace buildings have been left to symbolize Western imperial barbarity and China’s “century of humiliation.”<sup>35</sup>

In the spring of 1900, Boxer rebels overran the city before it was occupied by the Eight Nation Alliance, a foreign military coalition – composed of troops from Japan, Russia, Britain, France, the United States, Germany, Italy, and Austria-Hungary – that occupied Beijing from 1900 to 1901, this time looting the Forbidden City. The Empress Dowager Cixi’s apartments were a urinal for the foreign soldiers and the sacred Temple of Heaven was transformed into stables for the foreigners’ horses. This proved to be but a sorry prelude to the Qing Dynasty’s

collapse in 1912. When the erstwhile President of the Republic died in 1916, tumultuous rule eventuated as the city passed from warlord to warlord. In 1919, Beijing became the epicenter of the May Fourth movement, exciting yet disruptive as student demonstrations roiled the capital. In 1925, the Father of Modern China, Sun Yat-sen, lost his battle with liver cancer there. Two years later, Beijing was deprived of its function as the ROC's capital – which was transferred to Nanjing – and the city quietly sank into decline.

By the mid-1920s, the comparative stability and seemingly better economic prospects in Manchuria proved irresistible for Zhu Ti's parents. At the end of 1929, when Zhu was just three years old, the family packed up, rented out their Beijing *siheyuan* (traditional northern courtyard home), and made for north of the pass. The family first settled in Shuangchengbao (now a district of Harbin) in Heilongjiang province, where Zhu began her formal education in 1930; her father found work at the Bank of the Three Eastern Provinces (*Dong san sheng guan yin hao*). Shuangchengbao was an area that the Qing had made the centerpiece of a major project of social engineering in the 1800s, to relocate Manchus from Beijing to Manchuria, in part to settle the land but, even more importantly, to head off Russian imperialist incursions.<sup>36</sup> The project precipitated unofficial migration to the region, and perhaps even inspired the entrepreneurial Zhang family patriarch, who thus arrived in Manchuria about 100 years after the Beijing-based Manchus and some 300 years after Li Zhengzhong's paternal predecessor, Mingshan.

In 1931, the Zhang family left Shuangchengbao for Jilin City,<sup>37</sup> along the banks of the Songhua River. Jilin was officially established as a fort city in 1673, well-situated to guard against Russian expansionism; four mountains surround the city, providing safe harbor in an auspicious setting. Jilin was further surrounded on three sides by a crenelated grey brick city wall, thirteen feet high with eight gates. The fourth side faces the North Liao River, earning the city the epithet "River City" (*Jiang cheng*), from a poem crafted by the Kangxi emperor when he visited the city in 1682, to observe local customs and to fish for sturgeon on the river's rich waters.<sup>38</sup> This excerpt from Kangxi's famous poem celebrates the Songhua River's strength and Jilin's military capacity:

Coursing swiftly downstream, we startle the water-dragons,  
Our masts and vessels densely moored by the River City.<sup>39</sup>

Nearly three hundred years after Kangxi penned his poem celebrating River City, it was an inspiration for a popular song by the conductor Bai Shihai (b. 1956): "Shipping song on the Songhua River" [Songhua jiang fang chuan ge].<sup>40</sup>

From its establishment and through the Qing Dynasty, Jilin was home to a thriving shipbuilding industry.<sup>41</sup> In the 1680s, Pierre Joseph d'Orléans wrote that the city was "the most illustrious city of the whole province."<sup>42</sup> However, in 1888, Sir Henry James wrote that during the rainy season Jilin's riverside streets turned into a quagmire, except for the few covered with wooden planks. James described the city as a cesspool, with dead pigs, dogs, and filth of all sorts on the streets; in no uncertain terms, he condemned Jilin's market as "one of the most loathsome spots in the whole inhabited earth."<sup>43</sup> By the 1880s many of the buildings, even the

ones on piles, were in disrepair. The western section, home to residences of retired officials and public offices, was built over a swamp and was often under water, and James noted that locals traveled by boat from location to location; he compared it unfavorably with Venice.<sup>44</sup> According to James, Jilin, with its poor shops and run-down buildings, was no more than an eyesore. By the early 1900s, however, with rapidly increasing migration to the region, Jilin began to be populated with good shops, better homes and roads, and two significant temples. The city's center and east came to be dominated by businesses such as shipbuilding, fencing, housing, and road repair, each of which used enormous quantities of local wood. Jilin's workforce became famed for their skills, especially in making wooden furniture, tanning hides, and fashioning *wula* shoes – leather shoes stuffed with grass as insulation for the freezing winter months.<sup>45</sup>

In 1937, at the age of 16, Li Zhengzhong published his first volume of collected writings, *Yu Yin guan shi cun* [Yu Yin pavilion poems], a collection of classical-style poems that unfortunately remains lost to this day, although parts of it have been retrieved from contemporary newspapers. For the volume, Li wrote a poem in praise of Jilin City, and one of its most prominent sites, North Mountain: “Su zhongqing ling: Deng Beishan” [Recounting heartfelt emotions: Ascending North Mountain]:

The winding path of the small bridge wends its way around the sparse forest,  
the Fei pavilion remains in the shadows.  
Ascending to myriad heights,  
nothing any longer entangles my heart.  
A distant bamboo flute fatigues,  
deeply submerged in a delicate fragrance,  
the meditation room is expansive.  
The river and the mountains are indistinguishable,  
this mortal life is disparate and bewildering,  
I stop temporarily, to croon.<sup>46</sup>

The natural environment of, and around, Jilin City inspired and attracted Li as it did the Zhang family.

Zhu Ti's family arrived in Jilin in 1931 and quickly established a business, a shoe store on Henan Street called *San jin dong* (Three into the East).<sup>47</sup> Both Zhu Ti's father and his father before him were merchants and the family was considered quite well off; Zhu Ti's family was estimated to be the fourth-richest family in Jilin City.<sup>48</sup> Zhu's father, Zhang Weiran (1901–1960), was a businessman with many interests – in Beijing, he had been in the food business. Zhu's mother, Li Jingshu (1896–1978), was a native of Beizhen county, in Liaoning, a neighboring province of Jilin; for her, their move was a Manchuria homecoming. Zhu, then, was raised in a stable, loving household, with parents who encouraged her to engage in outdoor activities and to study. One of Zhu's earliest memories was of the date trees (*zao shu*) in their Beijing courtyard home, where she played as a child.<sup>49</sup> According to her recollections, the young Zhu was known for her studious and “formidable



character” [*lihai xingge*], and her refusal to be bullied by either her elder brother or her younger sister.<sup>50</sup> Zhu’s parents had great dreams for their daughter and, indeed, for all their children. Zhu’s brother and sister both went to university – where he studied architecture, and she studied economics. Zhu’s primary school education was briefly interrupted by the Japanese invasion that resulted in the closure of many of Manchuria’s schools until the spring of 1932. Then, she continued her schooling, where she gained a reputation for being a consistent class leader and top student in her classes.

The Manchukuo education that Zhu received, and that officials touted as symbolic of their progressive rule, stressed vocational studies that were openly advocated as the most appropriate for the population. Critics, however, argued that such an education would only produce a subservient working class. In Zhu’s novella “Wo he wo de haizimen” [Me and My Children] (1945), published in the Japanese-owned, Chinese-language journal, *Xin Manchou* [New Manchuria], the education system is denounced by the protagonist, who mourns that “in today’s situation [students] have actually lost the opportunity to move onto the next level of schooling.”<sup>51</sup> Yet despite such criticism in the state’s foremost journal, that education provided youth like Li and Zhu the tools necessary to earn money and forge careers to document their dissatisfaction with what they identified as an increasingly regressive and repressive socio-economic order. As the occupation wore on, classes were increasingly taught in Japanese and most men were directed toward vocational studies while women took courses to become a “good wife, wise mother” (*xianqi liangmu*), an ideal first formulated by the Meiji-era Japanese educator Nakamura Masanao (1832–1891), in 1875.<sup>52</sup> Li and Zhu thus grew to maturity in an environment rife with contradictions: they were encouraged to study, but no consensus existed between the rulers and the ruled regarding the most fitful uses of their education.

In 1937, at the age of 14, Zhu enrolled in high school at Jilin Provincial Women’s National High School, the alma mater of famed writers Mei Niang, Wu Ying, and Xuan Ling (n.d.).<sup>53</sup> Her love of reading, and the growing stature of her predecessors, prompted her to begin writing. Her first essay, “Zhu Ti” [Zhu Ti] appeared in Beijing’s *Funü huabao* [Women’s pictorial] and was edited by the writer, editor, and revolutionary Yuan Xi (1919–1979).<sup>54</sup> Yuan was born in Fengtian (currently Shenyang) and he fled Manchukuo for the more liberal atmosphere of Japanese-occupied Beijing after being jailed and tortured for anti-Manchukuo activities. Zhu met Yuan through Huang Xu (n.d.), a neighbor on Beijing’s Fuyou Street. In Beijing, Yuan encouraged Zhu to write. In the preface to her collected works, *Ying* [Cherry], Zhu asserts that writing helped her to overcome her struggles with adolescence and what she perceived to be outdated social standards:

As a matter of fact, when I wrote “Melancholy on the Mighty Black Dragon River,” in addition to portraying a strong native place flavor, I also had another little consciousness. Undoubtedly, readers of this volume will immediately recognise this kind of consciousness in the novella “Cherry,” where it is more clearly carved on the surface. From start to finish, I feel that it is a huge insult to a woman’s intrinsic self if she must rely on a man to provide for her. Naturally, I do

not actually oppose man and woman living together, but I am attempting to address how that lifestyle can finally be made more reasonable, and how to organize its arrangement. A man and a woman living together is the singular ever-evolving artery of humankind. However, in order to fully be a woman, from start to finish one must have the self-awareness and ambition to be able to live independently – only in this way can one accomplish a woman's intrinsic self.<sup>55</sup>

Zhu writes of “a woman's intrinsic self” [*nüren de benshen*] to promote attributes essential to her understanding of ideal womanhood: self-awareness, ambition, and independence. Her work critiques inequitable gender constructs that subjugate women to men and makes it difficult for women to become “a woman's intrinsic self.” Zhu argues that she “naturally” (*dangran*) does not oppose man and woman living together but rather aims to enhance their relationships, to make them more “reasonable” [*heli*] for women. Zhu thus reiterates essential elements of May Fourth discourses of women's emancipation in terms that do not violate a sacred tenet of the Manchukuo cultural agenda – that a young, single woman should strive to become a “good wife, wise mother,” but with what Zhu viewed as essential modern characteristics. Her critiques of contemporary gender relations are constructed without direct reference to the Japanese, likely making her work seem innocuous to Manchukuo officials. But writings that describe students in a pathetic condition, “oppressed and exploited under the wheels of life,” constitute precisely the type of subversive literature that officials sought to silence.<sup>56</sup>

In Jilin Provincial Women's National High School, one of her teachers was the previously mentioned scholar Sun Changxu, a “Jilin talent” (Jilin *caizi*) and one of Changchun's Four Elders (Changchun *si lao*); later in life, he served as curator of the Jilin Provincial Museum of Literature and History.<sup>57</sup> Sun was born in Jilin and taught in institutions across Manchukuo and the Northeast, before and after 1949. The first half of his professional life was devoted to the study of oracle bones (also known as dragon bones) and engravings.<sup>58</sup> Oracle bones exhibit early versions of Chinese characters, traced to the once-mythic Shang Dynasty (1700–1027 BCE). The bones record questions and answers gleaned from reading cracks formed on ox scapulae or turtle plastrons by applying heat with a metal rod to the bone. Sun was instrumental in saving the bones from being lost altogether to Chinese medical practitioners who viewed them as healthful; the bones were crushed and used in tonics for ailing hearts, kidneys, and livers. In the latter half of his career, Sun taught and published his research findings. From 1931, he taught at Jilin Provincial Women's National High School. There, he taught Mei Niang (as a student in 1934–1935) and, in 1936, was the editor of her first collection of writings, *Xiaojie ji* [Young lady's collection], a volume that remained lost until 2019; previously, the only trace of it was thought to be a contemporary review by Shanding in the foreword to Mei's second volume of collected writings, *Di'er dai* [The second generation].<sup>59</sup> After 1949, Sun was a Director of the Chinese Department of Northeast Normal University and, in 1978, became a member of the National Committee of the Fifth Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (China's legislative advisory board).

In high school, Zhu Ti shared a table with a classmate named Pan Xiangning (1924–2001), who became her best friend. After graduation, Pan married Li Huan (1917–2010), a graduate of Fudan and Columbia universities. From 1946 to 1948, Li Huan was chief editor of the newspaper *Shenyang ribao* [Shenyang daily]. In 1947, in elections from 21 November to 23 November, Pan, at the age of 23, was elected as the youngest representative for the ROC's first National Congress, which was held in Nanjing from March to May 1948.<sup>60</sup> Later that year, Pan and Li Huan left with the Nationalists for Taiwan. Li, subsequently a protégé of Taiwan's President Chiang Ching-kuo (1910–1988), went on to serve as Taiwan's 15th Minister of Education (1984–1987) and the 12th Dean of Taiwan's Executive Yuan (1989–1990). After Pan's 1948 departure, Zhu would not see her friend again for four decades; she did not even know her whereabouts until the late 1980s, when Zhu and Li saw an article about Li Huan in a local Shenyang newspaper.

## Two Lives Entwined

It was in 1937 that 16-year-old Li Zhengzhong and 14-year-old Zhu Ti met.<sup>61</sup> Coincidentally, Li's cousin, Wei Jinchun's daughter, Wei Youlan (1923–2013), was a classmate of hers and introduced Zhu to Li's first volume of poetry, which featured the above-cited classical-style poem lauding Jilin's North Mountain. In addition, Li's paternal aunt, Li Yingchun (n.d.), rented a home from Zhu Ti's family, one alley away; their relationship blossomed from Li's frequent visits to his aunt and their shared keen interest in literature. In Jilin, the young couple entertained themselves at the city's major attractions, including the park at North Mountain, Jiangnan Park, and the city's famous Catholic Church. Although North Mountain had been a focus of recreation and religious activities for hundreds of years, the public park was built between 1924 and 1926, at an estimated cost of 30,000 gold *yuan*.<sup>62</sup> A major feature of the park is the *Fanxue* Hall, a Qing-era brick pavilion at the eastern base of North Mountain, where scholars and writers would gather to drink wine and compose poetry. On the west side of North Mountain, the *Kuangguan* pavilion originated as a small pavilion (the first built in the public park) and over time it became a bell tower for praying for peace; it is said that if the winds make the bells ring on New Year's Eve, the weather for the year will be good.<sup>63</sup> The original structure was octagonal and made of wood, reminiscent of the Manchu-style *Dazheng* (Great Government) Hall in the old imperial palace still standing in Shenyang. In 1964, the *Kuangguan* was rebuilt with reinforced concrete and expanded. In 2007, the structure was demolished, rebuilt, and expanded yet again.

Through the late 1930s, Li and Zhu's relationship deepened, but the merging of their families was not to be an easy undertaking. Initially, Zhu's parents did not approve of Li's relatively low status and, further, he was still a student. How could they allow their daughter to marry a boy descended from so many farmers – and not even big landowning ones? How could he possibly provide adequately for their daughter? Ultimately, Zhu's stubborn refusal to end her relationship with Li forced her parents to accept their relationship.

In 1938, Li took the entrance exam of the Harbin Institute of Technology and entered the electrical department. In Harbin, Li hoped to become an engineer at the Fengman Hydropower Station after graduation; that station has since been called the “Mother of China’s Hydropower” (*Zhongguo shuidian zhi mu*).<sup>64</sup> In 1937, the Japanese had begun construction on the massive hydropower station outside of Fengtian; it only began generating electricity in 1943. During the course of its construction, an estimated 10,000 Chinese laborers (of an estimated 100,000) died due to slave-like labor conditions and insufficient food, housing, and clothing. In 1945, when the Soviets invaded Manchuria, they dismantled the six German-American manufactured generators as war booty and sent them to the USSR – they were never returned.<sup>65</sup> In 1954, the Chinese government bought new generators for the facility, ironically from the Soviets.<sup>66</sup> From 1955 to 1966, Li Peng (1928–2019) was the deputy director and chief engineer of the dam; in 1989, as the fourth premier of the PRC, he earned the nickname “Butcher of Beijing” for his deadly crackdown on the Tiananmen demonstrations. While in office, Li also helmed construction of the Three Gorges Dam, the largest dam in the world; two of his children operated a power monopoly that was dismantled after his term ended. Li Peng is widely disliked in China today, for his brutality and corruption.

In late 1938, when Zhu was catching a train from Harbin back to Jilin, Li accompanied her to the station, where she told him that, despite her family’s objections, she hoped one day that they could live together, a bold move that clearly demonstrated her headstrong character to Li.<sup>67</sup> After graduation from high school in 1940, Zhu entered Jilin Province Women’s Normal School, a teacher-training institute, where she boarded. Shortly after Zhu began her studies, the Education Ministry sent a Japanese teacher to teach Japanese language and to prompt staff to promote the Concordia Association. In 1941, while attending teacher training school, Zhu began to publish short articles in the capital Xinjing’s *Great Unity Herald* and she worked at *Jilin ribao* [Jilin daily]; she published under the names Xingzi and Zhu Ti. As Zhu began to embark on her writing career, Li proposed that she adopt the penname Zhu Ti because at that time he was often using the penname Xing Lang, and he believed that the two names fit well together. “Xing” means apricot – and represents “female elegance” – while “Lang” is light or bright.<sup>68</sup> The name Zhu Ti has the aura of a talented person, one with intimate feelings. “Zhu” refers to the red innards of coniferous trees, and relates to emotions, loyalty, and chastity. “Ti” is a character rarely seen today, yet it has a history of meaning beautiful and comfortable. The Tang poet Zhang Jiuling (678–740), whose work figures prominently in the volume *Three Hundred Tang Poems*, used the word in reference to a beautiful woman. Two famous women in the early to mid-twentieth century had nicknames that included “Ti”: Sun Qian (1897–1978) and Zhao Yidi (1912–2000). Sun, whose nickname was Qianti, was the wife of short story writer Yu Dafu (1896–1945), who was arrested in 1945 and executed by the Japanese shortly after Japan lost the war. Zhao, a famous beauty of the Republican period and the second wife of the Manchurian warlord Zhang Xueliang (1901–2001), had the nickname Zhaoti.

After Li began studies in Harbin, his parents realized that they could no longer afford the tuition and living expenses, so Li challenged the entrance exams for the

newly established University of Legal Administration (*Fazheng daxue*) established in January 1939 in Xinjing. Li enrolled to study law and thus became the first in his family to go to university. At the time, Chinese men and women could go to Japan to study at university level, if they could afford it; there were highly competitive scholarships for top students. Li, however, remained in Manchukuo where, together with Japanese, Manchus, Russians, and Koreans, he studied for exams that prepared him for a career in law. All students at the university ate the same food, as formal restrictions against the non-Japanese consumption of white rice were lifted there. The language of instruction was Japanese, and Li was sent to Japan to study and improve his Japanese-language skills during his university years (in 1939) and then for half a year after completing law school in 1941; he boarded with different families in Tokyo, Yokohama, Nara, and Kyoto. In addition to academic studies at the university, students had to engage in physical exercise. In the warm seasons, students learned martial arts and how to ride horses. Winter exercises were conducted two to three times a week and included sitting in a pool of frigid water and running around the university's outdoor compound for ten to fifteen minutes – without clothes – in temperatures as low as –30.

In the university's library, Li discovered that many publishing companies in Shanghai produced progressive Chinese-language works that were not widely available in Manchukuo, like those of Lu Xun (1881–1936).<sup>69</sup> Lu, China's most celebrated fiction writer of the twentieth century, championed literature that focused on the dark side of society to raise readers' social conscience. Li was excited to gain access to such books – writings in colloquial, modern Chinese; these inspired his own literary creation. Li wrote to Shanghai's famous Uchiyama Bookstore, expecting to be able to purchase books through mail order.<sup>70</sup> The response he received was that it was illegal to mail books from Shanghai because of import restrictions. However, he was also informed that stores in Japan could mail such books to him, as Manchukuo was incorporated in Japan's empire. The Uchiyama Bookstore had been established in 1917, by a Japanese Christian Sinophile, Uchiyama Kanzō (1885–1959).<sup>71</sup> The bookstore had the largest collection of Japanese works in China along with the most Japanese translations of Chinese works. The store was frequented by some of the most esteemed Chinese writers, such as Lu Xun, whose works were published by Uchiyama in the 1930s, and political figures, such as Chen Duxiu (1879–1942), co-founder of the CCP, and Guo Moruo (1892–1978), a communist scholar, author and official. The bookstore had a historical impact that still has yet to be fully recognized. After World War Two ended in 1945, Uchiyama closed the store and returned to Japan, where he served as the first director of the Japan–China Friendship Association that was established in October 1950.

At university, Li studied under the calligrapher, engraver and poet Wang Guanglie (1880–1953), considered one of the “Three Talents East of the Pass” (Guandong *san caizi*).<sup>72</sup> Wang was a native of Fengtian who had graduated from Beijing University, returned to Fengtian and, in the 1920s, served as the vice-president and president of the Fengtian Carving and Calligraphy Association and was the chief editor of the Fengtian newspapers *Da gongbao* [Big bulletin] and *Xiao gongbao* [Small bulletin].<sup>73</sup> In addition, he taught and edited the Japanese arts and

literature supplement in the *Dongsansheng gongbao* [Three eastern provinces bulletin]; he continued to work as an editor at the newspaper after 1932, when its title was changed to *Great Unity Herald*, the state's pre-eminent newspaper.<sup>74</sup> After the Japanese invasion, he moved to Xinjing and worked as chief editor at the Manchukuo Book Company (*Manzhouguo shu zhushi hui*). In the 1930s, he worked at the newspaper *Shengjing shibao* [Shengjing times] and the journals *New Manchuria* and *Qilin* [Unicorn]. Wang published multiple volumes of calligraphy and served on committees judging national exhibitions of calligraphy. He specialized in the styles of *lishu* (clerical script, created from the Warring States [475–221 BCE] to the Qin Dynasty [221–206 BCE]) and *weibei* (also known as stele-style calligraphy or “tablet of the Northern Wei Dynasty” [386–534 CE]). Wang's mentorship further sharpened Li's skills in the styles of the “Sage of Calligraphy,” Wang Xizhi (303–361), who lived in the Jin Dynasty (265–420) and is considered by many to be the greatest calligrapher in Chinese history.<sup>75</sup> In 1938, Li entered “The Calligraphy Department of the First Manchuria Art Exhibition” (*Di'yi hui Manzhou meishu zhanlan shufa bu*) (MAR), and his entry was awarded “Selected.” His entry was an interpretation of the “Yan Ran ting” (Yan Ran pavilion) by Ma Zicai (a famed scholar of the Song Dynasty). In August 1939, Li entered the Second MAR, and was awarded “Excellence.” The following month, Li won a gold medal at the Manchuria–Japan Calligraphy Exhibition for work modelled on that of the renowned Qing calligrapher, and “leading scholar-artist of his day,” Zhao Zhiqian (a native of Shaoxing, Zhejiang; 1829–1884).<sup>76</sup> Zhao's calligraphy also had a strong influence on Li. In 1940, he further participated in the “China–Japan Calligraphy Exhibit,” winning a top prize.<sup>77</sup> From 1940 to 1945, Li was selected to exhibit in the Third to Fifth MAR.

It is noteworthy that the Manchukuo authorities encouraged calligraphy exhibitions. Manchukuo's first prime minister, Zheng Xiaoxu, has a dual historical reputation – he is widely criticized for his collaboration with Japan, yet his calligraphy is deemed to be among the finest in Chinese history and is highly prized to this day. As suggested by the above exhibitions, the authorities viewed calligraphy as a valid and valuable cultural legacy for Manchurians but also and, perhaps even more, for the Japanese. However, in Korea, calligraphy exhibits were discontinued after 1932; they were “initially part of the Joseon Fine Arts Exhibitions in colonial Korea but was abandoned in 1932 because calligraphy was thought to lack visual modernity.”<sup>78</sup> In Japanese colonial Taiwan, calligraphy was not allowed in the Taiwan Fine Arts Exhibitions. Calligraphy exhibits, or the lack thereof, thus demonstrate varied geographic and cultural dimensions of Japanese imperialism.

In 1942, Li graduated with a law degree from the University of Legal Administration. Upon graduation, approximately one out of ten students went into government service, while most enlisted – or were enlisted – in the military. Li did not, as he was an only child with two dependant parents. For those entering government service, it was common for graduates to return to the location where their family lived. There, they could be appointed general cadres. Li returned home to study and pass the national, high-level civil service examination to become a “recommended officer” (*jianren guan*); these officials were hired at one level higher than a general cadre, with responsibilities and status equivalent to

those of a county magistrate. Li then worked as a law clerk before his 1944 promotion to full judge in Manchukuo's low-level law administration for the Chinese, dealing primarily with civil and minor misdemeanor crimes.<sup>79</sup> He has noted two reasons for this work. First, he was an only son, and his aging parents depended on him to earn more than a sustenance wage. His starting salary as a judge was 150 *yuan* a month, while at that time average government salaried posts paid less than 100 *yuan* and skilled laborers commonly received less than 50 *yuan*; average people generally earned around 10 *yuan* or less per month.<sup>80</sup> Second, he hoped to help Chinese who were brought to court before him.

While studying at university, Li befriended Liang Surong (1920–2004), a native of Changtu, Liaoning province.<sup>81</sup> After graduation, Liang traveled to Japan for six months of further study at Meiji University (established 1881), earning his Doctor of Law degree. Upon his return, he joined Li at work in Xinjing's central law court. While there, Li and Liang oversaw a case that demonstrates their shared concern for fellow Chinese subjects. In the winter of 1942, a Japanese policeman was strangled one night on a Xinjing street. The authorities used torture to extract confessions, and Wang Benzhang and eight other people were sent to trial. Three internship judges, including Li and Liang, volunteered to serve as defense lawyers. They successfully defended their clients; the court acquitted and released them, to low-key though popular acclaim. However, they were then assigned to hard labor that killed them.<sup>82</sup> On 27 March 1944, Liang was arrested and imprisoned by the Japanese for violating "The Maintenance of Public Security Act." Liang had secretly joined the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party, KMT) in 1939 and after graduation, in December 1941, he was appointed Secretary of the Changchun City Party Department of the KMT. Li stepped forward to act as Liang's defense lawyer; in the end, Li was unsuccessful, and Liang was sentenced to eight years in prison. Liang was released after the Japanese surrender and he subsequently served as a member of the Liaobei Provincial Party Committee and Director of the Propaganda Department of the KMT, and the Secretary-General of the Siping City Party Department.<sup>83</sup> In 1948, he was elected as the first legislator of the Legislative Yuan in Liaobei Province. In March of the same year, the CCP army captured Siping and Liang escaped in disguise. In February 1949, he arrived in Taiwan, and served as the Legislative Court vice-president in 1989 and, in 1990, president, a position which he held until December 1991. In 1998, the Taiwan Strait Peaceful Reunification Promotion Association was established in Taipei, and Liang Surong became the first chairperson.

While working as a judge, Li continued to publish in multiple journals, newspapers, and books, under thirty six pennames, including Li's most frequently used pennames Ke Ju, Wei Changming, and Xing Lang, as well as Chang Chunteng, Jin Ge, Li Mo, Li Ren, Li Xin, Li Zheng, Mu Ke, Shi Wan, Wan Nianqing, Wei Chengming, Wei Feng, Wei Ruoying, Wei Zhiji, Xiao Jin, Xiao Ke, Yu Jin, Zheng Shi, Zheng Zhong, and Zi Jing. Multiple pennames were used by writers so that readers would not realize that one writer was contributing so much to a publication – and in the attempt to hide their identities, if need be, from officials. By the early 1940s, his writings had appeared in Manchukuo's most prominent publications, including the *Great Unity Herald*, *New Manchuria*, *Shengjing Times*, *Unicorn*, and *Xin qingnian* [New youth].

From the establishment of Manchukuo, officials paid significant attention to writers, attempting to control literary narratives and their spread throughout society. Literary regulations banning subversive, negative, and even pessimistic writings were promulgated, and became increasingly onerous in the early 1940s. On 21 February 1941, in the *Manzhou riri xinwen* [Manchuria daily news], the government published the “Eight Abstentions” (Ba bu), banning the following:

1. Rebellious tendencies toward the current political situation.
2. Criticism of the shortcomings of national policies or non-constructive suggestions.
3. Stimulating opposition to national consciousness.
4. Singular focus on describing the dark side before and after establishment of the country.
5. Decadent thoughts as the theme.
6. About love and desire, descriptions of killing, love triangles, love games that denigrate chastity, lust, love’s sexual desire or dying for love, incest, and adultery.
7. Description of the cruelty of crimes or being too explicitly upsetting [in doing so].
8. Use of matchmakers or maids as themes, exaggerated descriptions of the peculiar state of affairs in red-light districts (*huajie liuxiang*).<sup>84</sup>

These were published with the intent of curbing criticism of Manchukuo and its depiction as a “paradise land” (*letu*). As is demonstrated throughout this book, writers like Li and Zhu could, at times, evade censorship while openly violating the above abstentions.

In 1941, for example, the Puzzle Bookstore (*Yizhi shudian*) published Li’s novel *Xianghuai* [Nostalgia], under his surname with his then most popular penname of: Ke Ju; it had previously been serialized in the *Great Unity Herald* from November 1940 to January 1941. *Nostalgia* tells the story of a fictional young man, Jin Xiang, who fled his native place when it was invaded by bandits; he returns seven years later, at the start of the novel. *Nostalgia* reflects badly on contemporary life in the “paradise land”: “change is too fast,” as Jin sees once formerly upstanding people wasting their time gambling or getting intoxicated. The three main characters, Jin, Bai, and Hu appear powerless to implement the changes in their lives that would save them. Jin cannot find his correct path. Bai falls victim to the poisons of an “economic society” and she leaves Jin for another man, while Hu is married off in a feudal marriage against her will and dies. The native place that Jin yearned to return to had been turned upside down, bringing him to the realization that “life is empty.” One element of the story worth noting is that Jin returned home seven years after a bandit invasion. In 1940, when Li began to publish the novel, the year was officially known in Manchukuo as the seventh year of the *Kangde* reign, placing the arrival of those fictional bandits suspiciously close to the start of the all too real Japanese invasion, nine years before.

As a writer, Li was automatically, compulsorily enrolled as a member of the Manchukuo Writers and Artists Concordia (*Manzhouguo wenyijia xiehui*, established



in 1941), but he tried to avoid attending meetings or activities that were organized by the power behind that institution, the Japanese Kwantung Army.<sup>85</sup> Other writers were sent to the notorious South Manchuria Railway's Fushun mine to report only on how happy the Chinese laborers there were, as they lived and worked in slave-like conditions.<sup>86</sup> One of the most prolific Manchurian writers, Wang Qiuying (1913–1996), described terrifying conditions in Manchukuo's mining industry in his short story "Kuangkeng" [Mine pit] (1940) in which the main character experiences "a lifetime of oppression."<sup>87</sup> Writers were also sent along the Songhua River to write about how rich the natural environment there was. After the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1942, the Manchukuo Writers and Artists Concordia pressured writers to describe positive developments of the war and the benefits of Japanese control over the occupied parts of China. Many writers responded to the state's call for action, as authorities often took recalcitrant writers into custody, without charges or sentencing, for ten to fourteen days to encourage compliance. Li was spared such frightful experiences, in no small measure because of his employment as a judge.

In 1942, Li self-published his first collection of modern-style poetry, *Qiyue* [July], illustrated by his friend, Wang Jinlian (1915/16–?).<sup>88</sup> He decided to self-publish because investigators had taken over two years to review the volume, which seemed to have stalled in or, even worse, failed the official publication review. Upon *July*'s publication, Li was scrutinized by the police and the book was withdrawn from the market. In his interrogation, he was asked why he wrote the book, why he published it without permission, and why he did that without hope of making much of a profit.<sup>89</sup> Li was told that, in addition to the above, there were three major issues with the volume: the date of publication is cited in the manner of the ROC (*Minguo* 31), and not that of Manchukuo (*Kangde* 9); the poem "Shuang hua" [Frost flowers] suggests the resistance of the weak; and, finally, the title *July* could refer to the start of the Chinese War of Resistance Against Japan, which officially started on 7 July 1937. The police then investigated both him and the publishing house for a further two months. Notably, in November 1944, the *Chinese Osaka Daily* published "Frost Flowers" in Osaka, Japan, for circulation across the Japanese empire, demonstrating differing contemporary levels of censorship.<sup>90</sup>

This is the poem, "Frost Flowers":

You and I are little  
Frost flowers taking shape on people's window shutters

From starting our little life  
Our little hearts are full of horror

You say that we must melt  
Melt because of a person's breath

Your pure love is like white snow  
As bright as white snow

We tremble in the cold winter days  
Weaving a pattern with no color

We worry about the sun crawling up the window shutter  
The sun's weak rays shyly smile

Although it is only a little life  
Although it is only a little life

The little heart is full of hope  
We must hold onto our feelings

We have a fleeting dream  
To tie our lives together

But for two little frost flowers  
Ah, little sincere prayers

.....  
.....

We do not know what day will bring the spring  
Our season will not have a spring

You and I will melt into two drops of dirty water  
To fall from the window shutter

A winter day

“Hearts... full of horror,” “a little life,” and hope that is “a fleeting dream” proved too negative for Manchukuo’s censors but were acceptable two years later to those in Japan. Ironically, the *Chinese Osaka Daily* had greater circulation than Li’s collected poems and reached even more readers.

In 1942, Zhu Ti graduated and began teaching at Jilin City North Mountain Primary School, as her personal life underwent profound change. She entered the workforce and her relationship with Li deepened, despite their living in different cities. On holidays, Li would go to Jilin or Zhu would go to Xinjing, the capital. In Xinjing, one of their activities was to go see European, American, and Manchurian films at the Fengle Theatre, a state-of-the-art cinema formally opened in October 1935.<sup>91</sup> The theatre was built on Fengle street by a Japanese businessman and was designed by Nihon Sankyō kenchiku shiji Tsutomu-sho (Office of Nihon (Japan) Sankyō Architects), at the considerable cost of approximately 350,000 *yuan*; construction took a year and a half. Its external shape is that of a piano and inside it was equipped with the most advanced German technology and expensive furnishings. It was known as the “Number One Theatre in East Asia.” The theatre had two levels – the first level contained numbered chairs while the second featured numbered *tatami* mats. At first, it was exclusively used as a *kabuki* theatre, for Japanese only.<sup>92</sup> Subsequently, it functioned as a theater for the capital’s population more broadly. Famous individuals attended the theater, including the

Japanese general and politician Tōjō Hideki (1884–1948), and famous actors performed onstage, including the “Queen of Peking Opera,” Mei Lanfang (1894–1961). After the start of the Pacific War, German, Japanese, and Manchukuo films dominated the screens. During the Soviet occupation (1945 to 1946), the theater became the meeting space for Soviet authorities. Under ROC control, it resumed operation as a theater and after 1949 featured locally produced films. The building still exists today, but it no longer functions as a cinema.

In 1942, worsening economic conditions, exacerbated by inflation, shortages of consumer goods, and war demands, compelled Zhu’s parents to abandon life in Manchukuo for the comparatively freer atmosphere of Beijing, then also under Japanese occupation. Her parents moved back to Beijing in the first half of 1942, to their courtyard home on Fuyou Street. To allay her parents’ concerns over their daughter remaining in Manchukuo without family, the young couple announced their engagement, initially contrary to the wishes of her parents who were opposed to her marrying a man from such a humble background. Li was busy in Xinjing and unable to attend the engagement ceremony, at which gifts were presented to Zhu’s parents on his behalf.<sup>93</sup> In 1943, Zhu travelled to Beijing for a New Year visit with relatives and to firm up wedding plans. Zhu returned with a copy of *Shishi huabao* [Current affairs pictorial]. In it was her first major work of fiction, “Da Heilongjiang de youyu” [Melancholy on the mighty Black Dragon River].<sup>94</sup> Zhu surprised Li with it.

It was on 20 April 1943, during the *guyu* (grain rain) solar term,<sup>95</sup> that Li and Zhu married at the Yanbinlou fandan (Banquet House Hotel) in Jilin, a popular place for the well-connected and wealthy to hold wedding banquets.<sup>96</sup> Following their celebration, they left for Xinjing and bought supplies for their new apartment together at Xinjing’s Three Nakai department store,<sup>97</sup> the Baoshan department store,<sup>98</sup> Qiulin Company,<sup>99</sup> Taifahe,<sup>100</sup> and Zhenxinghe.<sup>101</sup> As the literary scholar Pan Wu (also known as Shangguan Ying, 1931–2009) described, “a young couple of writers from Jilin City [came to Changchun], Wei Changming (Li Zhengzhong) and Zhu Ti, like a breeze blew into a silent literary world. [They] published large numbers of literary works.”<sup>102</sup> While “a silent literary world” is not an entirely accurate description of the contemporary literary world, Pan does suggest the readership that Li and Zhu cultivated. At the end of the busy year of 1943, the couple welcomed their first child, a daughter, Li Qi, and they were consumed with caring for the baby, working, and obtaining necessities.

During Manchukuo’s final years, the couple attained a high profile in the literary world but they could not survive solely on income from writing, since few journals or newspapers paid authors well for their work; for example, in 1944 Zhu was paid 6 *yuan* for every 1000 words for her story, “Linju xiao jing” [Little scene of the neighbors]. Zhu supplemented their meager income, first working at an accounting firm and then by teaching, while Li continued to work as a judge and pursued his interests in writing, editing, and calligraphy.<sup>103</sup> While her in-class, and his in-court, activities cannot be known, their published critiques of contemporary society must have manifested in their workplace behavior. As noted already, in 1945, Zhu criticized her teaching experiences in her novella “Me and My Children” while the two legal cases described above suggest Li’s attitude toward his work and the legal system.

In 1943, one of the most active members of Manchukuo's literary world, Liang Shanding, published his famous first novel *Lüse de gu* [Green valley]. Liang was a major figure in the local literary world – a writer, editor, and a central figure in encouraging younger writers, such as Tian Lin (her most popular penname was Dan Di, 1916–1992) who, as a Manchurian student in Japan, had written the novella *Andi he Mahua* [Andi and Mahua]. It tells the fictional, tragic story of a young couple (a Polish man and a Chinese woman) whose lives in Manchuria are destroyed by foreign invasion and poverty. Liang encouraged Tian to publish her dark novella and, in part because of it, Tian was jailed upon return to Manchukuo; when released she was ordered to work in a relatively remote northern city at a movie magazine.<sup>104</sup> Liang's own career was at its height when he wrote *Green Valley*, which was edited by his wife, writer-editor Zuo Di.<sup>105</sup> It is the story of a group of “Robin Hoods” operating in rural Manchuria. The novel first appeared in serial form in the newspaper *Great Unity Herald*. As a reflection of Liang's status, *Green Valley* was published on the front page, often accompanied by illustrations. *Green Valley* was quickly translated into Japanese, without Liang's prior knowledge or consent. With that, it became the subject of much greater interest from the Japanese – the reading public as well as officials. In response, Liang added a female Japanese character and changed focus with the intent of satisfying Japanese readers, while attempting to attract less official attention to the work. When *Green Valley* moved from serial to book form, it was subject to censorship and all copies were ordered to be burnt; ultimately, the book was “only” censored after the intervention of friends and the publisher, who could have been bankrupted if the censors insisted on destroying all copies of the work.<sup>106</sup> The book was published with a red note on the white cover, under the green letters of the title, alerting readers that the book dealt with some political issues. Liang and his family then fled to join the expatriate Manchurian community in Beijing. Their home in Xinjing was ransacked by the authorities, and they did not return during the occupation.

In 1944, Li found himself the target of censorship, for his 40,000-character novella “Youhuo” [Temptation].<sup>107</sup> In July, it was published in *Xin Chao* (New wave) magazine, but it was subjected to the removal of page 61 and part of page 62. The novella is thus “*wutou*” (headless) and the novella before it “*wuwei*” (tailless). The novella was meant to be serialized in full, but the following month the editor refused to continue printing the story, leaving it then tailless as well. Censors refused to allow the entirety of a story with a married male protagonist who passes the national-level exams, obtains a coveted position as a judge, is despondent and begins a relationship with a former lover who is brought before him for theft. Censors also noted the additionally negative effect of Li's use of a first-person narrative in the story – the effect suggests that the author is describing his own life experiences.

As evidenced above, Zhu thus embarked on her 1940s writing career in an environment that was subject to weighty official regulation; by the time she began publishing her writings, famed women writers Bai Lang (1912–1994), Mei Niang, Wu Ying, Xiao Hong (1911–1942), Xuan Ling, and Zuo Di had already either left the region or changed career paths. Inspired by their work, and that of her

husband, and the positive responses to her first novella, Zhu wrote in emulation of their critiques of the subjugated socio-economic status of women. From 1943 to 1945, Zhu published her writings in journals, including Xinjing's *New Wave* and *Xing Ya* [Flourishing Asia], Beijing's *Funü huabao* [Ladies pictorial], and the Japan-based *Chinese Osaka Daily*. Like Liang and Li, Zhu suffered setbacks that illustrate Manchukuo's oppressive literary world.<sup>108</sup> In 1944, she attempted to publish two controversial novellas. She submitted "Xiao Yinzi he ta de jiazu" [Little Yinzi and her family] to *New Manchuria*, which rejected the novella, which outlined the rape and sale of a young girl. The novella "Du Bohai" [Cross the Bo Sea] was accepted by *New Manchuria* but was then excised by censors for blatantly anti-Manchukuo content; it was replaced by "Little Scene of the Neighbors". "Little Yinzi and her Family" and "Cross the Bo Sea" were later published in her 1945 collected works, *Cherry*. The banning of these two novellas and Zhu's employment as a teacher suggest the contradictions inherent to life in Manchukuo, with all its restrictions and pressures. While producing transgressive writings that warned readers of the "pernicious influences" (*liudu*) that prevailed in contemporary society, Zhu was paid to teach young students.<sup>109</sup> At an international conference on Manchukuo literature in 1992, Li and Zhu argued that Chinese women writers were empowered by a colonial misogyny that, for much of the occupation, dismissed their work as inconsequential, sparing them the intense investigation that dogged most male writers.<sup>110</sup> In the last years of the occupation, however, women writers like Zhu were also targeted for investigation. In the spring of 1945, the last year of Japanese occupation, the high point of Zhu's writing career was marked by the publication of her collected works, *Cherry*. It is a testament to the turmoil of that final year and officialdom's relatively low regard for women's writings that *Cherry* was published at all.

In April 1945, two thousand copies of *Cherry* were published by the National Library Society (*Guomin tushushe*); today, only a handful exist. The National Library Society was founded by a Shandong migrant, Liu Zhongquan (n.d.). He began publishing popular novels in traditional styles such as martial arts and romance genres, but later specialized in contemporary fiction, such as that produced by Zhu Ti. *Cherry* was the last Chinese-language volume of fiction to be published in Manchukuo. The volume contains eight works of fiction, a poem, and a preface. Contemporary critics lauded Zhu's writings for their native place feeling, thus siting her work within a favoured genre as officials promoted the development of native place literature to distinguish Manchurian literature from that being published in the neighboring Republic of China.

In the preface to her collected works, Zhu notes that the stories "Meng yu qingchun" [Dreams and youth], "Melancholy on the mighty Black Dragon River," and "Ying" [Cherry] (including her banned "Cross the Bo Sea"), constitute a trilogy through which she develops her critiques of "man and woman living together."<sup>111</sup> These are dark depictions of women's lives: in "Dreams and Youth," Sasha suffers depression over what she perceives to be a failed marriage; in "Melancholy on the Mighty Black Dragon River," the dying Yana is tormented by her lost youth and her status as an aging, tubercular, widowed Russian woman in Manchuria; in "Cherry," "Mother" is raped, robbed, and exiled while attempting

to reunite with her husband who had left Shandong to search for work in Manchuria. Despite the challenges facing the female protagonists, each one attempts to change her life. Readers are compelled to sympathise with the female protagonists whose life experiences cast negative light not only on their marriages but on contemporary society. Significantly, each entry in the trilogy notes how Manchuria's majestic environment influences the women's lives, alternately inspiring and incapacitating them. The women share a profound bond with Manchuria's famed "black mountains, white waters" (*heishan baishui*) that inspire them to reject their subjugated socio-economic circumstances.

In 1945, the final year of Manchukuo, Li published three books: *Wuxian zhi sheng wuxian zhi lu* [Infinite life, infinite journey] (*Xingya zazhishe* / Flourishing Asia Magazine Society); *Sun* [Bamboo shoot] (*Guomin shudian*/National Bookstore); and *Chuntian yi zhu cao* [A blade of spring grass] (National Library Society). Two more books were published in October, after the collapse of Manchukuo: *July*, the previously published volume of collected poetry and Li edited a collected volume of fiction by Manchurian writers, *Lu huo* [Furnace fire]. Veteran Changchun Film Studio screenwriter Wang Aiji, in his recollections, states that he skipped out of school to read *Furnace Fire* but decades later he could not remember its contents. However, he did recall the sad and desolate mood of the volume. For him, the dark nature of the volume was accentuated by the book's cover, featuring bright red flames set against a black backdrop.<sup>112</sup>

## Civil War

Chinese celebration of Japan's loss in the war was dampened by the Soviet invasion that terrorized the region's population. The Soviets looted much of Manchukuo's industrial infrastructure, which was dismantled and shipped to Eastern Europe, depriving the region of a tangible economic legacy that might have mitigated subsequent condemnation of the Japanese occupation era in its entirety. A prominent example of the looting is the already noted Soviet theft of the Fengman Dam's generators, but the looting extended to even ordinary items such as furniture and light bulbs.<sup>113</sup> When the Soviets captured Fengtian in early August, they proceeded with three days of rape and pillage. In the collapse of Manchukuo and the Soviet invasion, three of Li's already typeset books were lost, Li's position as a judge ended, and he began work as an editor at the National Bookstore.

On the day of Manchukuo's dissolution, 18 August 1945, Li's university schoolmate and former fellow prosecutor Liang Surong approached Li about starting a newspaper, the *Guangfu bao* [Recovery paper]; they launched the paper and distributed it free of charge. In October, the Changchun Progressive Writers Assembly (Changchun *jinbu zuojia jilhui*) elected Li to edit the journal *Dongbei wenxue* [Northeast literature].<sup>114</sup> This project brought together writers of the region and nearly twenty of Manchuria's writers published work in the journal, including Dan Di and the prominent fairy tale writer, Yang Cideng (1915–1995).<sup>115</sup> A total of six issues were published before Li's imprisonment by the KMT for half a year, for his law career; the civil war brought the journal to a complete end.

Through the calamitous Soviet, KMT, and CCP battles in the mid- to late-1940s, Zhu's energies were consumed with taking care of their daughter, Li's parents, and obtaining household necessities.

In 1946, when most of the Soviets left the Northeast (the last Soviet troops did not leave Dalian and Lüshun until 1955), the CCP's Northeast Democratic Coalition Army (*Dongbei minzhu lianjun*, NDC [1945–1948]) attacked the former capital of Xinjing, renamed Changchun, on 14 April, capturing it on 18 April. To discredit the NDC, the KMT issued a report in the *Zhongying ribao* [Central daily]: “Writer Wei Changming died in Changchun” [Zuoja Wei Changming zai Changchun yu nan], claiming that Li Zhengzhong had been killed when the 8th Route Army attacked and looted the former capital. One of the top CCP leaders, Li Lisan (1899–1967), who had recently returned from the Soviet Union, was appointed head of the Northeast Bureau of the CCP's Central Committee liaison department.<sup>116</sup> He sent Ouyang Shanzun (1914–2009), who was the son of his secretary the dramatist and director Ouyang Yuqian (1889–1962), to find Li, free him from jail, and ask him to refute the fake news.<sup>117</sup> Li then joined the CCP and engaged in propaganda work, writing for the *Dongbei ribao* [Northeast daily] and its supplement *Jiefang junren* [Soldiers of the PLA]. In late 1946, Li left for Harbin to serve in the NDC, and he subsequently participated in the December 1946 to April 1947 “Campaign of Going South of the River Three Times, to Guard Linjiang Four Times” (*San xia jiang nan, Si bao Linjiang zhanyi*), to protect the CCP base south of the Songhua River.<sup>118</sup> The KMT's losses of these battles determined the fate of Manchuria and, ultimately, China. In 1947 and 1948, Li worked as an editor at *Northeast Daily* and *Jinri daibiao* [Representing today], while also teaching at the Harbin Literature Institute (*Haerbin Wenxueyuan*). Zhu remained in Changchun, participating in political meetings and taking care of their daughter and Li's parents as the turmoil of civil war unfolded.

Li remained a member of the NDC through the civil war and wrote many reports on the army's activities. On occasion, he accompanied soldiers on night marches, walking long distances. During the winter months, liquid in the soldiers' flasks often froze solid. His did not because it contained *baijiu*, a “white alcohol” akin to vodka, though it frequently is of a higher alcohol content, from 80 to 120 proof. According to Li's recollections, over the course of a night, he could drink a lot – “more than two catties of wine” (*yi hu er jin duo jiu*).<sup>119</sup> The more he drank, the warmer he felt that he was. But with inadequate food, rarely more than a loaf of black Russian-style bread rationed to last a week, consumption of such strong alcohol led to serious health problems and after the civil war Li had to have half of his stomach removed surgically.<sup>120</sup> On 9 March 1948, Jilin City was captured by the CCP and he returned there to work, transferring from the Harbin Military Engineering School to a Youth Teaching Group.

At the start of May 1948, Zhu left Changchun to join Li, walking more than 60 miles to Jilin, and leaving Li's parents with their eldest daughter. When Li questioned her about the safety and necessity of her journey, she responded: “What am I afraid of? The rarest thing in life is to act according to one's own mind, to determine one's own fate – is it not right?”<sup>121</sup> Zhu then enlisted as a soldier in the CCP forces, as the civil war drew to its climax. Her departure from Changchun was

followed shortly thereafter by the CCP's brutal siege of the KMT-held city, from 23 May 1948 to 19 October 1948 – The Siege of Changchun (Changchun *weikun zhan*).<sup>122</sup> For 105 days, “food prohibited entry, people prohibited exit” (*liang jin ru, ren jin chu*).<sup>123</sup> The CCP army created an empty zone around the city and any residents attempting to leave were shot. KMT soldiers, however, were allowed to cross over to join the CCP forces; nearly 14,000 soldiers did so.<sup>124</sup> Between 100,000 and 300,000 citizens were starved to death or murdered attempting to escape; about 80% of the population of Changchun was killed.<sup>125</sup> The aim of Lin Biao (1907–1971), the senior general who directed the Siege of Changchun with the blessing of Mao Zedong (1893–1976), was to “make Changchun a dead city.”<sup>126</sup> After absolutely everything edible was consumed, average citizens were driven to cannibalism.<sup>127</sup> The KMT general, Zheng Dongguo (1903–1991), refused to surrender the city. After the siege, Zheng served one year as a prisoner of war before being released by the CCP. Lin Biao went on to become one of the most powerful leaders of the CCP in the 1960s – he edited the famous collection of Mao's writings, *The Little Red Book*, and was named Mao's successor in 1966. Lin met his fate in 1973 when he died in an alleged attempt to flee China after a failed attempt to assassinate Mao. The Siege of Changchun is a forbidden topic in China today, for it clearly undermines narratives of the supposedly “close” relationship between the CCP, its military and “the people.”

Li Zhengzhong reported events at the front lines of the Liaoning–Shenyang (Liao–Shen) campaign, launched by the CCP against the KMT, from September to November 1948. By this time, the KMT had lost major Northeast cities, including Changchun. At one point, Li had to “pass through a river of blood” (*chenghe de xueshui zhong tangguo*) and climb over corpses to send back news of a battle.<sup>128</sup> This campaign was a “strategic and tactical defeat” for Jiang Jieshi (1887–1975), leader of the KMT.<sup>129</sup> Fengtian, then renamed Shenyang, was taken by the CCP at the start of November 1948; then, Li and Zhu worked at the Political Department of the Shenyang Northeast Military Region. In 1948, Zhu stopped writing; Li followed suit seven years later, in 1955.

## The “Mao Years”

After the founding of the People's Republic, Li and Zhu remained in Shenyang, devoting themselves to teaching and domestic life; their family expanded with the birth of another daughter, Li Jie, in 1952, and a son, Li Qian, in 1955. Zhu was transferred from the Political Department of Shenyang Northeast Military Region to the Changchun Construction Company and then the Jinzhou Food Company. In 1953, she began work at the Liaoning Provincial Department of Commerce; later, she was transferred to Liaoning Provincial Scientific Equipment Company. Through the early 1950s, Li worked in the army, teaching and producing educational materials. In 1955, Li was assigned to Shenyang Asbestos Products Factory as a teacher and as principal of the Asbestos Products Factory's Red Cotton School. By the end of the Anti-Rightist campaign (1957–1959), Li had been demoted to labor in the loading docks in the factory. In 1961, he was downgraded further.



In 1957, a popular, outspoken writer, Liu Shaotang (1936–1997), bought the Zhang family home in Beijing. Liu was nicknamed “Son of the Grand Canal” (Yunhe *zhi zi*) due to writing about his family’s hometown Tongzhou (today a district in Beijing), alongside the North Canal. Liu bought the home and several old paintings for 2,500 *yuan*.<sup>130</sup> Later that same year, in the Hundred Flowers campaign, Liu was persecuted as a “big poisonous weed” (*da ducao*) for his writings and then as a Rightist for his criticism of Mao’s Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art (1942), which outlined what Mao believed were appropriate guidelines for writers – to serve the socialist state and its workers by producing politically approved work that lauded the new order. The Maoist regime labelled Liu one of Beijing’s “Four Black Swans” (*si zhi hei tian’e*) and silenced him for 22 years. A similar fate lay in store for Li Zhengzhong.

In 1969, during the Cultural Revolution, Li was denounced as an anti-revolutionary and was “sent down” for labor reform in the Dongdazhangzi Brigade of the Jianchang County Alkali Factory in rural, south-west Liaoning province. Their home in Shenyang was looted and the books, calligraphy, and other items collected in their home were lost forever – with no compensation from the government that willfully unleashed the devastation. In the impoverished mountainous region, Li received no income; the only activity that he could engage in was gathering fertilizer and grasses for heating materials. Gone were the ink, brushes, paper, and, most importantly, the freedom necessary to continue with his calligraphy and writing. The family had to rely on Zhu’s salary, as she accompanied Li in a separate category – as a member of the May 7 Cadre School, in which cadres, intellectuals, and students were sent from the urban centers to learn from farmers and engage in manual labor. Since Zhu was not guilty of any so-called offense, she could earn a basic wage for her work while Li was allowed nothing; her small wage packet supported the family of six (including Li’s father) for the decade that they lived there.<sup>131</sup> In those ten years, Li learned farm work, and his neighbors, in time, praised him for his contributions to the production team. After the family’s rural exile was ended, they made numerous return trips to visit friends made there.

### Life in “The Opening Up”

With the death of Mao in 1976, and the downfall of the Gang of Four, the politically motivated persecution of Manchukuo’s writers was overturned. In 1979, the couple returned to Shenyang, where he worked in Shenyang Shimian Products Factory and Zhu returned to her work in Liaoning Science Equipment Company. Li resumed his calligraphy career and adopted even more pennames to publish writings in a variety of newspapers and journals; new names included: Chang Feng, Li Yu, Li Yichi, Li Shaoqiu, and Li Mo.<sup>132</sup> In 1981, Li won the first prize in the “Shenyang City People’s Calligraphy Competition.” At that time, their children had no idea that decades earlier their father had been an award-winning calligrapher. Their son, Qian, excitedly told Zhu that a person with the same name as Li had won the competition, upon which she surprised him by telling him that the person was, in fact, his father. Both Li and Zhu retired in 1983, and for a while Li served as vice president of the Shenyang Calligraphers Association and as a

librarian at the Shenyang Cultural and Historical Research Institute. In the 1980s and 1990s, Li's calligraphy featured at over 100 exhibitions, including dozens of individual exhibits.

From the 1980s, increased interest in regional and wartime literature has resulted in the re-publication of much Manchukuo writing in anthologies of twentieth-century Chinese literature. Zhu's work was featured in the 1986 volume of fiction by Manchukuo's women writers, edited by Liang Shanding, *Changye yinghuo* [Fireflies of the long night]. The success of that volume led to another volume edited by Liang, *Zhuxin ji* [Candlewick collection] (1989) – a collection of stories by Manchukuo's men writers; a story by Li is included. On 3 September 1991, the first Northeast China International Literature Academic Meeting was held, attended by many of the famous Manchukuo writers who had survived decades of CCP persecution, including Li and Zhu, Lan Ling (1918–2003), Liang Shanding, Mei Niang, Wang Qiying and Yang Xu (1918–2004). The work of Li and Zhu has since been published in multiple collected volumes, including *Dongbei xiandai wenxue daxi* [Northeast modern literature compendium] (1996) edited by the literary scholar and politician Zhang Yumao (1935–2019);<sup>133</sup> the magisterial, 45-volume *Dongbei lunxian shiqi wenxue zuopin yu shiliao bian nian jicheng* [Chronological collection of literary works and historical data in the occupied period of the Northeast] (2015) edited by retired Changchun Municipal Library Director and Manchukuo literature scholar Liu Huijuan;<sup>134</sup> and the most recent 33-volume *Wei Manzhouguo wenxue ciliao zhengli yu yanjiu congshu* [Bogus Manchukuo literary materials compilation and research series] edited by Liu Xiaoli, Director of the Manchukuo Research Center at East China Normal University in Shanghai.<sup>135</sup>

Li's calligraphy continues to be recognized for its excellence.<sup>136</sup> In 1986, Li won first prize in the Shenyang City New Couplet Competition and in November, the Shenyang Calligraphy Association held the Li Zhengzhong Poetry and Book Fair. In April 1987, the Heilongjiang Calligraphers Association and the Heilongjiang Provincial Federation of Literature and Art jointly organized the “Li Zhengzhong Poetry and Book Fair” in the newly completed Heilongjiang Calligraphy Activity Center; famed writer Xiao Jun (1907–1988) personally penned the title of the exhibit. In 1991 and 1993, Li was invited to hold calligraphy exhibits in Japan, in Tokyo and Nagano.<sup>137</sup> Li's giant seal inscription “Business Soul” stands to this day on a boulder at the Nagano Prefecture Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Li has held calligraphy exhibitions across China and in Vancouver (Canada), Oxford (Great Britain), and Taipei (Taiwan).<sup>138</sup> In June 1995, Li and Zhu were invited to Taiwan by the former Legislative Yuan President Liang Surong and the former President of the Executive Yuan, Li Huan, to hold the “Li Zhengzhong Calligraphy Exhibition” in the Taipei Pacific Cultural Foundation Exhibition Hall.<sup>139</sup> Liang was Li's old friend who had moved to Taiwan with the Nationalists and became dean of Taiwan's Legislative Court in his later years; he was a long-time advocate for peaceful reunification between the mainland and Taiwan. Li Huan was the husband of Zhu's best friend and gave the opening speech. Chen Lifu (1900–2001), a politician, one of the two brothers of the CC Clique (a political faction of the mainland Republican era), and the honorary chairman of the “Council for

the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of Both Sides of the Taiwan Strait,” penned the exhibition name. Qin Xiaoyi (1921–2007; Director of the National Palace Museum of Taiwan in the 1980s and 1990s), Huang Guangnan (b. 1944; director of the Museum of History, 1995–2004), Jiao Renhe (b. 1948; Vice Chair and Secretary-General of the Straits Exchange Foundation, 1993–1998), and many other Taiwanese politicians and celebrities attended the event. During their visit, Qin and Huang invited Li and Zhu on private tours of the Taipei Palace Museum and the Museum of History. The exhibition was a triumphant celebration of his calligraphy career as well as an opportunity to visit old friends.

In 2001, Li held the “Quest” calligraphy exhibit at the Asian Centre of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. In 2003, he was invited to hold a “Li Zhengzhong Calligraphy Exhibit” in Changchun. In the autumn of 2004, Li and Zhu both travelled to Oxford University in England, where they held the “Traces of the Sea of Ink” calligraphy exhibit, through the invitation of Professor Rana Mitter; at Oxford, they each gave a talk about their Manchukuo writing careers. In 2011, the Central Academy of Fine Arts edited a selection of poems by contemporary Chinese scholars, and selected poems by 33 living scholars over the age of 80, five per person – *Zhongguo dangdai xueren zi shu shici moji xuan* [Selection of contemporary Chinese scholars’ self-written poems].<sup>140</sup> The book brought together figures from China’s academic and book circles, such as Jao Tsungy-I (1917–2018), Feng Qiyong (1924–2017), Zhou Ruchang (1918–2012), and Zhou Tuimi (1914–2020); Li was the only person selected from the Northeast. In 2014, the Oral History Research Center and Museum, at the Communication University of China, chaired by television personality, producer, and social media commentator Cui Yongyuan (b. 1963), selected Li as the subject of an oral history project – the first person in Northeast China to be chosen.<sup>141</sup>

On 13 August 2012, Zhu Ti passed away in Shenyang, after a lengthy illness. Li Zhengzhong followed his beloved wife of seven decades in Shenyang on 23 February 2020. Together, they lay at rest in a truly auspicious location in Longquan cemetery, just outside of their second hometown, Shenyang. Together, they are atop a small hill facing a lake, surrounded by lush vegetation. Li’s calligraphy graces many areas in the cemetery’s grounds. Zhu’s grave is marked with a photograph of her and a replication of her volume of writings, *Cherry*, open at her favorite poem. Beside her, Li’s grave features a pedestal with his bust, looking alongside his beloved’s final resting place.

## Conclusions

The writing careers of Li Zhengzhong and Zhu Ti provide dramatic illustration of the complex nexus of Japanese colonial rule, personal ambition, and social ideals that structured Chinese lives in Manchukuo. Just children when the occupation began, the education system improved their reading and writing skills, enabling them to strive for careers in the literary world. They employed the popular medium of politically charged fiction to deliberate on life in the puppet state. Despite the

oppressive conditions faced by the protagonists in their writings, each one attempts to improve their lives in egregious circumstances. Through their work, Li and Zhu sought to raise awareness of the inequitable socio-economic conditions that they equated with contemporary society. Both created May Fourth-inspired Chinese literature in a Japanese puppet state, in pursuit of the literary goals advocated by the leading light of China's literary world, Lu Xun, who promoted the transformative potential of "grim realism" in native place writing.<sup>142</sup>

Jilin University scholar Jiang Lei has described Li's Manchukuo writing career as "atypical" (*feidianxing*).<sup>143</sup> While she argues that Li's work is not as intense or ostentatious as other contemporary writers, Jiang characterizes him as an "angry youth" (*fennu qingnian*).<sup>144</sup> Unlike other writers, he was not arrested, nor did he leave Manchukuo. Yet, despite his "atypical" experience, he was subjected to surveillance and censorship, demonstrating the extent to which officials attempted control over literary production. Jiang has outlined four types of Li's publications – 1) "zigzag writing [to] publicly publish" (*quzhe shuxie, gongkai fabiao*); 2) "straightforward expression of thoughts, [and so] the writing "escapes" (*zhishu xiongyi, zuopin "taowang"*); 3) "non-public publication, publishing material, [to] escape investigation" (*feigongkai chuban, wu shang fabiao, taotuo jiancha*); and 4) "post-war publication [to let the writings] see the sun again" (*zhan hou chuban, chongjian tianri*).<sup>145</sup>

Jiang provides examples for each of the four types of publication. For "zigzag writing [to] publicly publish," she uses the example "Gu cheng zhi xian" [Ancient city offering], published in *Women de wenxue* [Our literature] on 9 December 1941:

So many years fires burned in the shipyards  
 So many years still the buildings stood  
 Then the theme of conversation changed:  
 New market, what have you brought  
 The ancient city becomes lonelier, lonely  
 All wearables are replaced by rayon  
 All there is to eat is sorghum rice.

Li's poem is about Jilin city, and it begins with recognition of how long Jilin's shipyards have operated and how the "conversation changed," a subtle suggestion of the start of the occupation. Jiang suggests that the "new market" refers to the rapid urban construction in Manchukuo while "sorghum rice" is a reference to the 1938 prohibition on Chinese consumption of white rice. Li asserts that the city is becoming "lonelier, lonely" as the city declined in regional importance once Changchun was made the Manchukuo capital, Xingjing. Further, I note that rayon was considered a product foreign to China – in 1935, Suzuki Shinichi argued that the Free China boycott of Japanese goods in 1932, in response to the Japanese occupation of Manchuria, especially targeted rayon products in the Chinese market that Japan had "capture[d]." <sup>146</sup> Rayon in China, then primarily Japanese, was coined "artificial silk" upon its first introduction and, unlike silk, it can produce

toxic substances and its production is harmful to the environment. While it is not possible to know exactly why censors did not view the contents of Li's poem as negative, contemporary readers likely appreciated its opaque messaging.

The evidence that Jiang offers for Li's "straightforward expression of thoughts, [and so] the writing 'escapes' – is a poem published in the *Chinese Osaka Daily*. Writing under the penname Wei Feng, Li penned "Jiangshan" [Rivers and mountains].<sup>147</sup>

Ugh! How smashed [are the] rivers and mountains  
 From a dream I remember you standing tall  
 From a dream I saw again that you are smashed  
 Where are your opulent years?  
 ...  
 One day a storm blew in  
 In the end you are smashed  
 I know this is a dream  
 This is completely a dream.

Jiang notes that Chinese readers would relate "rivers and mountains" to one's country. That same term, however, does not have the same connotations in Japanese as it does in Chinese. Li explicitly describes a country that once stood tall – and opulent – but was crushed. The poem was rejected by the censors in Manchukuo, so Li submitted it to the *Chinese Osaka Daily*, where it was approved for publication. Thus, Li wrote openly in Chinese of despair over the smashing of his country and the poem "escaped" censorship, by being published in Japan.<sup>148</sup> Ironically, the *Chinese Osaka Daily* enjoyed widespread circulation, so the poem reached a wider audience than it would have had it been published in Manchukuo.

In terms of how Li engaged in "non-public publication, publishing material, [to] escape investigation," Jiang notes that when Li began to study at the University of Legal Administration, he was elected to run the student's school journal. He named it *Nan feng* [South wind], a classical allusion to patriotism for China. In the journal, he also published a short story titled "*Huali de feixu*" [Gorgeous ruins]. Ostensibly, the story is about a student who goes astray, but it also tells of how gorgeous the capital city is – yet it is also described as a "tumultuous stone post" (*luan shi gang*). A stone post may not be very "gorgeous," but a key word here is *luan* – the word means turmoil, and also relates to rebellion or revolt; in 1989, Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997) accused the Tiananmen protesters of fomenting "*dongluan*" (turmoil), a charge that echoed the evils of the Cultural Revolution and ensured that the protesters were in grave danger. Since *South Wind* only circulated among the university community, it was not subject to official review – otherwise, the article would certainly have been censored. Subsequently, Li was not invited to edit the 1940 edition of the journal, which had its name changed from the Chinese *South Wind* to the Japanese title *Hakkō* [The whole world].

The fourth and final way in which Li published was "post-war publication [to let the writings] see the sun again." As noted previously, Li re-published *July*, as

well as other works; most notably, “Temptation” had its censored first page restored and was published in *Northeast Literature*. As chief editor, Li also encouraged other writers to submit work that had been censored or refused during the occupation.

One characteristic that the writings of Li and Zhu share is that the Japanese do not feature in their work. The Japanese are not portrayed in a positive or negative manner; they are missing entirely. This absence is remarkable, considering the importance of the Japanese in Manchuria and by noting that several of Zhu’s stories, “Melancholy on the Mighty Black Dragon River” and “Dreams and Youth,” feature protagonists who are Caucasian, a population whose significance paled in comparison to the Japanese but which, like the Chinese, were relegated to a subordinate position in the colonial order. How should this Japanese absence be assessed? Such an absence is understandable given the nature of Japanese rule; grave punishments could be meted out to writers for explicitly negative or pessimistic reflection on Manchukuo, the Japanese, or Japan. In 2004, Prasenjit Duara questioned whether Liang Shanding’s *Green Valley* (1942) warrants its post-Mao resurrection as an anti-imperialist work since it is not explicitly critical of the Japanese or their puppet state.<sup>149</sup> What Liang feared after Japanese began to read *Green Valley*, and that was clear to Li and Zhu, was the personal cost of his novel: self-exile to Beijing in 1943, the persecution of his family, and the destruction of their home in Xinjing. The writings of Li and Zhu must be evaluated in light of their historical context and especially Liang’s persecution, as they published major works in the wake of his high-profile flight from Manchukuo. The absence of explicit reference to Japan, the Japanese, or Manchukuo afforded them the freedom to create critical Chinese reflections on the Japanese imperial order within which they lived.

Another, and perhaps the most prominent, characteristic that can be found in their literature is a general focus on the poor or abused members of society. Zhu Ti writes of sex workers, domestic and sexual violence, dancing and singing women, and poor Russian migrants, among others. Li Zhengzhong describes the lives of the poor, urban migrants from rural areas, criminal activities, generation gaps, and disgruntled professionals. The social circles they write of are melancholic, they are angry, they are often dispossessed and certainly not the images of the “paradise land” that Manchukuo officials sought to propagate. Both writers experienced censorship yet continued with their literary careers. Each was humble about accomplishments and abilities. They did not consult each other about what they wrote, but similarities in their work abound, and both found enthusiastic audiences for their work.

Japan’s defeat in World War Two, a divisive civil war, the collapse of the Republic on the mainland, and the peoples’ desire to consign an overly ambiguous colonial history to the past, all empowered narratives that criticized life in Manchukuo, as do the writings in this volume. The 1949 establishment of the CCP’s totalitarian regime, and the nationalist fervor the CPP fostered, glossed over the complexities of Japan’s puppet rule and buried deep the dark, highly critical literature that had enlivened Manchukuo’s literary world. Leaders of the PRC demanded literature that exclusively extolled the new socialist order and condemned so-called feudal

and bourgeois ideals more generally. In 1945, Zhu celebrated the publication of *Cherry* with her poem “Ziji de geling, ziji de ganqing” [My Song, My Feelings], writing,

I am only a little river on the cliff of mother earth,  
I am only a little grass among the bushes.<sup>150</sup>

In 1941, Li wrote that his work was “immature.”<sup>151</sup> Such modesty reflected their characters and may also have been meant to provide censors a false sense of security regarding their work. But that sentiment underlines a decades-long minimizing of the effect that such writers had on darkening perceptions of Manchukuo, through the production of consistently damning fictional depictions of contemporary life. Their writings were born of, and contributed to, Chinese alienation from the idea of Manchukuo as a “paradise land.” The writings that follow are a testament to their lives and careers as young Chinese living under Japanese colonial rule.

## Notes

- 1 Accessed 28 March 2020. <http://dighist.fas.harvard.edu/projects/russiaglobal/items/show/23>
- 2 For details, see Ronald Suleski, *Civil Government in Warlord China: Tradition, Modernization and Manchuria* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002).
- 3 For details, see Diana Lary and Thomas R. Gottschang, *Swallows and Settlers: The Great Migration from North China to Manchuria* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).
- 4 Marea Donnelly, “Japanese Blew up Chinese War Lord Zhang Zuolin in First Manchurian Incident,” *The Daily Telegraph* (4 June 2018). Accessed 3 August 2019. <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/today-in-history/japanese-blew-up-chinese-war-lord-zhang-zuolin-in-jieshi-first-manchurian-incident/news-story/5da3078f37c314b96d819cfab1eb8c77>
- 5 Bureau of Information, ed., *An Outline of the Manchoukuo Empire, 1939* (Dairen: Bureau of Education, 1939), 22–24.
- 6 Austin Fulton, *Through Earthquake, Wind and Fire* (Edinburgh, Saint Andrew Press, 1967), 19.
- 7 See Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003), chapter 4.
- 8 Sun Wenliang, “‘Manzhou’ yu ‘Dongbei’ de mingcheng jiqi yu Manzu de fazhan guanxi” [The development of the relationship between the names ‘Manchuria’ and the ‘Northeast’ and Manchus]. CCP: Neibu wenjian, n.d.
- 9 H. E. M. James. *The Long White Mountain* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1888), vi.
- 10 For example, see Asada Masafumi, “The China-Russia-Japan Military Balance in Manchuria, 1906–1918,” *Modern Asia Studies* 44.6 (November 2010): 1309.
- 11 See P. T. Etherton and H. H. Tiltman, *Manchuria: The Cockpit of Asia* (London: Jerrolds, 1932).
- 12 Population of Northeast China [https://www.google.com/search?q=population+of+Northeast+China&rlz=1C1GCEB\\_enCA888CA888&oq=population+of+Northeast+China&aqs=chrome..69i57.5337j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-](https://www.google.com/search?q=population+of+Northeast+China&rlz=1C1GCEB_enCA888CA888&oq=population+of+Northeast+China&aqs=chrome..69i57.5337j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-)
- 13 Li Zhengzhong. <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%9D%8E%E6%AD%A3%E4%B8%AD/16495462>
- 14 For example, see <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%9C%B1%E5%AA%9E> Accessed 10 June 2019.

- 15 See Norman Smith, "'Only Women Can Change This World Into Heaven': Mei Niang, Male Chauvinist Society, and the Japanese Cultural Agenda in North China, 1939–1941." *Modern Asian Studies* 40.1 (February 2006): 81–107.
- 16 See Norman Smith, "Regulating Chinese Women's Sexuality During the Japanese Occupation of Manchuria: Between the Lines of Wu Ying's 'Yu' (Lust) and Yang Xu's *Wo de Riji* (My Diary)." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 13.1 (January 2004): 49–70.
- 17 Beijing was named Beiping, 1928–1937, 1945–1949; for consistency, the former will be used.
- 18 The information in this section is from the Li family's genealogical records.
- 19 For details of Wang's life and photographs of him, see "Hei lin zhen Wangjiagou Wangshi jiazuo chuanqi – Wang Wenshan" [Wang family legend of black forest town Wangjiagou – Wang Wenshan], *Meiri toutiao* [Daily headlines] (14 March 2017). Accessed 15 August 2019. <https://kknews.cc/history/gvqgbpm.html>
- 20 In September 1913, his son, Wang Pushan (1895–1930), registered at Tianjin's prestigious Nankai school, where he forged a deep friendship with the man who would become China's premier after 1949, Zhou Enlai (1898–1976); from September 1917 to 1919, they boarded together at university in Japan. Ibid.
- 21 Zhen, "Jiyi dajia Li Zhengzhong" [The great master centenarian Li Zhengzhong]. Accessed 29 December 2020: <https://www.meipian.cn/8ru9qpc>
- 22 The Longmen Grottoes are outside of Luoyang. In 2000, UNESCO named the Longmen caves a world heritage site, for their: "outstanding manifestation of human artistic creativity." See "Longmen Grottoes." Accessed 4 August 2019. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1003>
- 23 Zhang Xin, "Wo chuanguozuo shi yinwei wo xiang biaoda ziji shi Zhongguo ren" [I create because I want to express myself as Chinese]. *Liaoning ribao* [Liaoning daily] (25 June 2015). Accessed 10 July 2018. <http://dangshi.people.com.cn/n/2015/0624/c85037-27201368.html>
- 24 Li Zhengzhong, "Xiao Pengyou: Shi zhounian jinian (zhuci)" [Tenth anniversary of *Little friends* (congratulatory words)] (1930, no. 483): 154. Chen Shi found this rare material in December 2018.
- 25 Zhang, "Wo chuanguozuo shi yinwei wo xiang biaoda ziji shi Zhongguo ren."
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Jiang Lei, "Dikang wenxue zuojia 'feidianxing' jingli di dianxing yiyi: Yi Li Zhengzhong wenxue shengya wei ge'an." [The typical significance of the "atypical" experiences of resistance literati: A case study of Li Zhengzhong's literary career], *Shenyang shifan daxue xuebao: Shehui kexuebao* [Journal of Shenyang Normal University: Social science edition] 3 (2017). Accessed 10 February 2018: [https://www.sohu.com/a/194536395\\_713945](https://www.sohu.com/a/194536395_713945)
- 28 For further information on Sun, see Li Xin, "Cihui guwenzi xuejia Sun Xiaoye" [Ancient script vocabulary scientist, Sun Xiaoye], *Meiri toutiao* [Daily headlines] (30 November 2016). Accessed 4 April 2020 <https://kknews.cc/culture/yam9g8b.html>
- 29 Witter Bynner, ed., *300 Tang Poems* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1920). Located at: [http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=Chinese%2FuvaGenText%2Ftei%2F300\\_tang\\_poems%2FHanTang.xml&chunk.id=0&query=](http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=Chinese%2FuvaGenText%2Ftei%2F300_tang_poems%2FHanTang.xml&chunk.id=0&query=)
- 30 The Li's were not related. For more information, see Accessed 26 December 2020. <http://character.workercn.cn/363/201704/14/170414103042568.shtml>
- 31 "Xituanshan." Accessed 1 August 2019. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xituanshan>
- 32 Li was 17 by Chinese reckoning, as a baby is one year old at birth and one year is added upon the passing of the first lunar New Year.
- 33 For details, see Tiffany Jenkins, "The Loot of China's Old Summer Palace in Beijing That Still Rankles." *Oxford Today* (7 March 2016).
- 34 Ibid.



- 35 When Li, Zhu and I visited London, UK, in October 2004, they were crestfallen upon learning that the British Museum's exhibit of Chinese antiquities was closed for renovations; they were looking forward to viewing the stolen materials.
- 36 See Shuang Chen, *State-Sponsored Inequality: The Banner System and Social Stratification in Northeast China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).
- 37 Jilin is the Chinese transliteration of the Manchu name of the city – Girin ula (city along the river).
- 38 For a contemporary account of a visit by Kangxi to Jilin, see Pierre Joseph d'Orléans, Earl of Ellesmere, transl., *History of the Two Tartar Conquerors of China: Including the Two Journeys into Tartary of Father Ferdinand Verhiest, in the Suite of the Emperor Kanh-Hi*. Richard Henry Major, ed. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1854), 112–113.
- 39 “乘流直下蛟龙惊/连樯接舰屯江城。” I cite, in part, Mark Elliott's translation, found in Mark C. Elliott, “The Limits of Tartary: Manchuria in Imperial and National Geographies.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59.3 (2000): 603–646, 612. See also: Accessed 8 June 2019. <https://www.quora.com/q/theeducationalblog/The-Kangxi-Emperor-and-His-Place-in-Chinese-History>
- 40 Bai Shihai, “Songhua jiang fang chuan ge” [Shipping song on the Songhua River], *Dangdai yinyue* [Contemporary music] (October 2015): 66–68.
- 41 James. *The Long White Mountain*, 282.
- 42 d'Orléans, *History of the Two Tartar Conquerors of China*, 112.
- 43 James, *The Long White Mountain*, 283.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Zhen, “Yongyuan de Zhu Ti” [Zhu Ti forever]. Accessed 4 April 2020. <https://www.meipian.cn/8hnmn6j>
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Wang Baolin, “Dangdai bai jia ti “San xi caotang: Li Zhengzhong” [Contemporary hundred home title “Three treasures thatched cottage”: Li Zhengzhong]. Accessed 30 December 2020. [https://glimmerite59.rssing.com/chan-36814595/all\\_p17.html](https://glimmerite59.rssing.com/chan-36814595/all_p17.html)
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Zhang Xingjuan, personal interview, Shenyang (14 February 2001).
- 51 Zhu Ti, “Wo he wo de haizimen” [Me and my children], Zhu, *Ying*, 76.
- 52 There are four characters for the slogan “good wife, wise mother.” In Japanese, *ryōsai kenbo*, and in Chinese, *xiangqi liangmu*. While the characters are the same, their order differs. See glossary.
- 53 Xuan Ling was born in Jilin. Her early works appeared in *Jichang ribao* [Jichang daily] and *Manzhou bao* [Manchuria news]. In 1940, she moved to Beijing, where she joined the North China Writers Association.
- 54 Yuan was jailed in Manchukuo in January 1942, for a month and a half. While living in Beijing, his novel *Beike* [Seashells] was awarded the top prize at the Second Greater East Asia Writers' Conference in 1943. For more information, see Chen Yan, “Acculturation and Border-Crossing in Manchukuo Literature: Mei Niang, Liu Longguang, and Yuan Xi.” In Annika Culver and Norman Smith, eds., *Manchukuo Perspectives: Transnational Approaches to Literary Production* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2019), 175–188.
- 55 Zhu Ti, “Xu” [Preface]. In Zhu, *Ying*, 2–3.
- 56 Zhu, “Haizimen,” 76.
- 57 Sun was also a teacher at Jilin Provincial First and Second Middle Schools, which Li attended. Zhen, “Bai yun mianhuai qi yi dajia Li Zhengzhong lao” [One hundred rhymes recalling for all, the centenarian Li Zhengzhong]. Accessed 29 December 2020: <https://www.meipian.cn/2uu1xbtg>
- 58 “Sun Changxu.” Accessed 3 January 2020 <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%AD%A9%E5%B8%B8%E5%8F%99>
- 59 See Shanding, “Qianyan” [Forward] in Mei Niang, *Di'er dai* [The second generation] (Xinjing: Wencong hang hui: 1940).

- 60 Li and Pan's children include: Li Qingzhong, Li Qinghua, Li Qingzhu, and Li Qing'an. In 1989, they were, respectively Deputy Director of the Environmental Department, Secretary General of the Chinese Olympic Association, Third Deputy Director of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee of the Executive Yuan, and a reporter for China Television. Wang Yingming, *Zili wanbao* [Independent evening paper] (24 September 1989).
- 61 Li Zhengzhong and Zhang Xingjuan, personal interview, Victoria, Canada (25 April 2004).
- 62 For information on, and images of, the park, see: "Bei shan kuangguan ting, qifu ping'an" [North Mountain Kuangguan pavilion, praying for safety]. Accessed 6 June 2019. <https://new.qq.com/omn/20190502/20190502A02K4I.html>
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 For further information, see Duan Xu, "'Zhongguo shuidian zhi mu': Jiu ba zhi shang de xinsheng, jiumi Jilin Fengman da ba de 'qianshi jinsheng'" [The mother of China's hydropower: New life on the old dam site, revealing the past and current life of Jilin's Fengman dam] Xinhua net (19 November 2018). Accessed 1 April 2019. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-11/19/c\\_129997361.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-11/19/c_129997361.htm)
- 65 "Fengman shuidianzhan de qianshi jinsheng: Sulian chaizou de fadian jizu, yizhi wei guihuan." [The past and current life of Fengman hydropower station: The Soviet Union removed the generators that have never returned] *Meiri toutiao* [Daily headlines]. Accessed 1 April 2019. <https://kknews.cc/zh-my/history/ab80ebx.html>
- 66 The Fengman dam was demolished in 2018 and 2019. Yoshikazu Hirai, "Blasting Starts on Dam 'Built with Blood' in Wartime China," *Asahi Shimbun* (13 December 2018). Accessed 6 August 2019. <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201812130060.html>
- 67 Zhen, "Jiyi dajia Li Zhengzhong."
- 68 Regarding apricots in Chinese culture, see China Sage, "The Symbolism of Flowers and Fruit in Chinese Art." Accessed 12 October 2019. <https://www.chinasage.info/symbols/flowers-and-fruit.htm>.
- 69 Some sources assert that Lu Xun's writings were not allowed in Manchukuo and yet a search on kongfz.com reveals numerous editions of his writings and at least one biography published in Manchukuo.
- 70 Zhang, "Wo chuanguo shi yinwei wo xiang biaoda ziji shi Zhongguo ren."
- 71 "Kanzō Uchiyama." Accessed 4 August 2019. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanz%C5%8D\\_Uchiyama](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanz%C5%8D_Uchiyama). For more information on the bookstore, see Naoko Kato, "Uchiyama Bookstore: Sino-Japanese Cultural Exchanges in the Midst of War." In Jonathan Henshaw, Craig Smith, and Norman Smith, eds., *Translating the Japanese Occupation: The Japanese Invasion of China, 1931–1945* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2021).
- 72 The other two are You Guochen and Rong Mengmei. You Guochen was from Kaiyuan, Liaoning, and could speak six languages, including English, Japanese and Russian. Rong (1878–1946) was a Manchu of the Yellow Banner, born in Jilin. He graduated from Tokyo's Hosei University and was appointed secretary-general in the Northeast Security Department under Zhang Zuolin. Rong, Manchu survivors, and former Qing officials drafted the "Founding Outline" for Manchukuo. After the state's establishment, he served as the director and chairman of the Jilin Office in 1932. In 1933, he served as the director of the Sanjiang Provincial People's Livelihood Department. In 1936, he was director of the Education Department of Heilongjiang province and later served as the governor of Heilongjiang. In 1939, seemingly having lost the trust of the Japanese, Rong returned to his hometown in Acheng, where he died in 1946. See Youya de Huzi (Wu Yonggang, Max) "Yi ge Dongbei wenhua jingying de chenlun: Lengyan jinguan Rong Mengei" [The sinking of a Northeast cultural elite: View Rong Mengmei with cold eyes]. *Youya de Huzi Shuo Jilin* [The elegant beard talks Jilin] (5 September 2020). Accessed 27 December 2020. <https://www.163.com/dy/article/FLP2RHOD0543B0HO.html>

- 73 “Wang Guanglie.” Accessed 4 August 2019. <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E7%8E%8B%E5%85%89%E7%83%88>
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 For more information, see “Wang Xizhi: Jin dynasty.” Accessed 26 December 2020. <http://www.chinaonlinemuseum.com/calligraphy-wang-xizhi.php>
- 76 “Couplet Dated 1867.” Accessed 26 December 2020. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/55495>
- 77 Chu Guoqing, “Zai Shenyang, you zheyang yi wei wenhua laoren” [In Shenyang there is this kind of cultured elder]. Accessed 5 April 2020. [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_48590acc0102x2hk.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_48590acc0102x2hk.html)
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- 80 Zhang, “Wo chuanguo shi yinwei wo xiang biaoda ziji shi Zhongguo ren.”
- 81 Information on Liang is from “Liang Surong.” Accessed 26 December 2020. <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E6%A2%81%E8%82%85%E6%88%8E>
- 82 Jiang Lei, “Wei Man jianzhu: Chongman zhengzhi yiwei de fuhao he miyu” [Bogus Manchukuo architecture: Full of political symbols and secret words]. *Meiri toutiao* [Daily headlines] (12 September 2019). Accessed 3 January 2021. <https://kknews.cc/history/r6vx3r.html>
- 83 Chen, “Cong zhimin xianchang tiyan dao houzhimin xing si.”
- 84 Hideki Okada, *Wei Manzhouguo wenxue* [Bogus Manchukuo literature] (Changchun: Jilin daxue chubanshe, 2001), 304.
- 85 Zhang, “Wo chuanguo shi yinwei wo xiang biaoda ziji shi Zhongguo ren.”
- 86 Jin Changhao, “Ri ju shiqi Fushun tankuang yu Zhong Han xiaoshuo” [Fushun mine in Chinese and Korean modern novels during the Japanese occupation]. Accessed 5 January 2021. <http://ealltaiwan.blogspot.com/2016/11/>
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- 88 Wang graduated from Waseda University and, in 1943, was employed in the Xinjing Economics Department.
- 89 For details, see Jiang, “Dikang wenxue zuojia “feidianxing” jingli di dianxing yi.”
- 90 Chen, “Cong zhimin xianchang tiyan dao houzhimin xing si.”
- 91 For further information and photographs, see “Chongqing lu shang de Fengle juchang jiu zhi” [The former site of the Fengle Theatre Cinema on Chongqing Road] Accessed 5 April 2020. [https://www.sohu.com/a/308698349\\_100188742](https://www.sohu.com/a/308698349_100188742)
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- 95 The sixth of twenty four traditional Chinese solar terms. “Guyu.” Accessed 5 April 2020. <https://www.chinatravel.com/facts/guyu.htm>
- 96 A photograph of this hotel can be seen in Zhu Ti and Li Zhengzhong files at Manchuria, Literature and Culture, 1900+ <https://www.manchurialiteratureculture.uoguelph.ca/manchukuo-writers/>
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- demolished in 1995. See “San Zhongjing baihuodian” [Three Nakai department store]. Accessed 30 December 2020. <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E4%B8%89%E4%B8%AD%E4%BA%95%E7%99%BE%E8%B4%A7%E5%BA%97>
- 98 Founded by Japanese businessman Maeda Ida, the store was completed in 1938; at that time, it was the tallest building in the city with a rooftop garden and observatory. It remains relatively intact at No. 19 Xinfu Road. See “Baoshan baihuodian” [Baoshan department store]. Accessed 30 December 2020. <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E5%AE%9D%E5%B1%B1%E7%99%BE%E8%B4%A7%E5%BA%97>
- 99 This company was established in 1867 by Russian Ivan Yakulevich Qiulin. It moved to Harbin’s Nangang District in 1902 and expanded into a shopping mall in 1927. In 1937, it was taken over by the British HSBC, and then the Japanese seized it in 1941. In 1945, with the defeat of the Japanese, the company was taken over by the Soviet Union, and was sold to China in 1953. It is famed for its famous “big bread” – *da mianbao* or *lieba*, weighing just over 3 pounds. See “Shenyang hong you: Qiulin gongsi jiuzhi” [Shenyang red tour: The old site of Qiulin company]. Accessed 30 December 2020. <https://min.news/travel/61b5604496c13bb88a7ca56261653815.html>
- 100 Taifahe was a Chinese owned and operated department store in Manchukuo, opened in 1934. For further information, see “Changbai dalou shi wu shangdian, name yi er san si shangdian shi na?” [Northeast history] (77) – Changbai building has five stores – So where are one, two, three and four?]. Accessed 30 December 2020. [https://www.sohu.com/a/388945939\\_276265](https://www.sohu.com/a/388945939_276265)
- 101 Zhen, “Yongyuan de Zhu Ti.” Zhenxinghe was founded during Manchukuo by the Chinese businessman Liu Mingyuan, on Dama Road. For information on Zhenxinghe, see “Xinjing gaikuang 49 – Baihuodian zhi Zhenxinghe” [Xinjing overview 49 – The Zhenxinghe department store]. Accessed 30 December 2020. [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_491f71050102vz63.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_491f71050102vz63.html)
- 102 Pan Wu’s observation in the article Shangguan Ying, “Dongbei lunxianqu Changchun zuojiaqun” [Changchun writers group in the enemy-occupied area of the Northeast], *Changchun wanbao* [Changchun evening news] (2 September 2004). For an overview of his career, see Liu Hongming, “Huainian Shangguan Ying xiansheng” [Missing Mr Shangguan Ying]. Accessed 28 December 2020: [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_4e3f48850100dv20.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4e3f48850100dv20.html). Shangguan was a major collector of Manchukuo literature – his collection was donated to Changchun Provincial Library, due to his long association with the library and his friendship with Liu Huijuan, a Manchukuo scholar and Director of the library. See also: “Shangguan Ying’s *Miao hong ji*” [Shangguan Ying’s *Red Traces Collection*]. Accessed 28 December 2020. [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_4e3f48850100d6ba.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4e3f48850100d6ba.html)
- 103 Li Zhengzhong, personal interview, Vancouver, Canada (23 September 2001).
- 104 For details and her previously unpublished autobiography, see Norman Smith and Chen Shi, eds., *Tian Lin zuopin ji qi yanjiu* [Tian Lin’s writings and research on them] (Shanghai: Jiaotong daxue chubanshe, 2018).
- 105 During the Cultural Revolution, she was jailed and sentenced to hard labor by the CCP and is said to have died upon hearing the news of Mao’s death.
- 106 See Wang Yue, “Literary Selection in a Historical Dilemma; Shan Ding’s Literary Proposition and Practice in Manchukuo.” In Culver and Smith, eds., *Manchukuo Perspectives*, 157–174.
- 107 For details, see Jiang, “Dikang wenxue zuojia “feidianxing” jingli di dianxing yiyi.”
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- 110 Zhu Ti and Li Keju, “1942 yu 1945 nian Dongbei wenyijie” [The Northeast’s literary world from 1942 to 1945] In Feng Weiqun, Wang Jianzhong, Li Chunyan, Li Shuquan, eds., *Dongbei lunxian shiqi wenxue guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* [Collection of papers from the International Symposium on Literature of the Enemy-Occupied Northeast] (Shenyang: Shenyang chubanshe, 1992), 408.

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- 112 Wang Aiji, “Zhi Shangguan Ying xiansheng de yi fen xin” [A letter to Mr. Shangguan Ying], *Changchun wanbao* (Changchun evening news) (16 June 1996).
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- 115 Jiang, “Dikang wenxue zuojia ‘feidianxing’ jingli di dianxing yiyi.” For information on Yang, see Chen Shi, “Fairy Tales and the Creation of the “Future Nation” of Manchukuo.” In Culver and Smith, eds., *Manchukuo Perspectives*, 28–43.
- 116 Li Lisan was not a relative of Li.
- 117 Both Ouyang’s had major careers in Chinese drama. Ouyang Shanzun performed on stage at the age of 93 and was nicknamed the “living fossil” (*huo huashi*). Accessed 2 January 2021. See “Ouyang Shanzun.” <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%AC%A7%E9%98%B3%E5%B1%B1%E5%B0%8A>. For Li’s recounting of the event, see Chen, “Cong zhimin xianchang tian dao houzhimin xing si.”
- 118 On this, and excellent photographs of Li and his calligraphy, see Chu Guoqing and Jiu Wangsun, “*Qian Meng* fuyao jian: 97 sui shufajia you chu yi bu sanwen ji” [Gusty notes on *Shallow Dreams*: A 97 year-old calligrapher published another collection of essays]. Accessed 29 December 2020. <https://freewechat.com/a/MzIwNTEyMzk5MA==/2649645825/1>
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- 120 See Chu Guoqing, “Bainian di shou Zhao Bei’an: Li Zhengzhong yu ta de shufa yishu” [One hundred years of bowing Zhao Bei’an: Li Zhengzhong and his calligraphy art]. *Wei Manzhonguo yanjiu zhongxin* (20 April 2020). Accessed 27 December 2020. <http://www.hnhs-media.com/xingyezixun/detail34328614.htm>
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- 124 A rare, Chinese account of the siege can be found in Zhang Zhenglong’s 1989 *Xue bai, xue hong* [Snow white blood red]. (Beijing: Jiefang jun chubanshe, 1989). It was banned in China, but not before 100,000 copies were sold.
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- 127 A critical account can be found at: “Lin Biao yi sheng zuida wudian: 105 tian e’si ji shiwan ren.” [The biggest stain in Lin Biao’s life: Hundreds of thousands died of starvation in 105 days]. *51 xinwen* (19 August 2014). Accessed 5 January 2021. <https://info.51.ca/news/china/2014-08/351429.html>
- 128 Zhen, “Yongyuan de Zhu Ti.”
- 129 Christopher R. Lew, *The Third Chinese Revolutionary Civil War, 1945–49: An Analysis of Communist Strategy and Leadership* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 113.
- 130 Their home included five rooms, plus one kitchen, one toilet, one firewood room, five jujube trees and five eucalyptus trees. Chu Guoqing, “Zuihou de Zhu Ti” [The last Zhu Ti]. Accessed 12 June 2019. <https://freewechat.com/a/MzIwNTEyMzk5MA==/2649645592/1>

- 131 Zhu Ti, personal interview, Oxford, England (31 October 2004).
- 132 “Li Zhengzhong.” <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%9D%8E%E6%AD%A3%E4%B8%AD/16495462>
- 133 It is Zhang’s collection that first inspired this project. Over the years, Zhang helped me in several ways, and I remember fondly visits to his office, his home with his wife, Wang Junping, and his friend, Li Zhengzhong. I do not think that my work would have happened without his work. For information on Zhang’s life and career, see Bianweihui, Zhang Yumao Xiansheng jinianji, eds. Zhang Yumao Xiansheng jinianji [*Remembrance Collection of Mister Zhang Yumao*]. Shenyang: Shenyang chuban faxing tuanji, 2021.
- 134 Liu Huijuan is a Manchukuo scholar and worked as Director of Changchun Municipal Library. She was a huge help for me for many years. I am greatly indebted to her.
- 135 Liu Xiaoli is one of the leading lights in the field of colonial literature studies, and she has interviewed many Manchukuo writers. In her own research, she is pushing the boundaries of the field in innovative and exciting ways.
- 136 For an in-depth evaluation of Li’s calligraphy, and examples of it, see Cheng Yiwei, “Jianshou ziwo rensheng de shufajia: Li Zhengzhong” [Calligrapher who sticks to his own life: Li Zhengzhong]. Accessed 2 January 2021. <https://kknews.cc/culture/v895651.html>
- 137 For more information, see Chu, “Bainian.”
- 138 For a moving discussion of Li’s post Mao years plus photographs and examples of his calligraphy, see Huang Wenxin, “Bainian yi meng: Zhuiyi ensi Li Zhengzhong” [One hundred years, one dream: Recalling teacher Mr. Li Zhengzhong], *Zhongguo fangtan wang* [China interview network] (29 February 2020). Accessed 27 December 2020. <http://www.fangtan.org.cn/app/view.php?aid=195935>
- 139 For more information, see Chu, “Bainian.”
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- 143 The following discussion of Jiang’s work is based on this article: Jiang, “Dikang wenxue zuojia “feidianxing” jingli di dianxing yiyi.”
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- 148 For details on the *Chinese Osaka Daily*, see: Culver and Smith, eds., *Manchukuo Perspectives*.
- 149 Ibid., 227–228.
- 150 Zhu Ti, “Ziji de geling, ziji de ganqing” [My song, my feelings], in Zhu, Ying, n.p.
- 151 Ke Ju, *Xianghuai* [Nostalgia]. Xinjing: Yizhi shudian, 1941.

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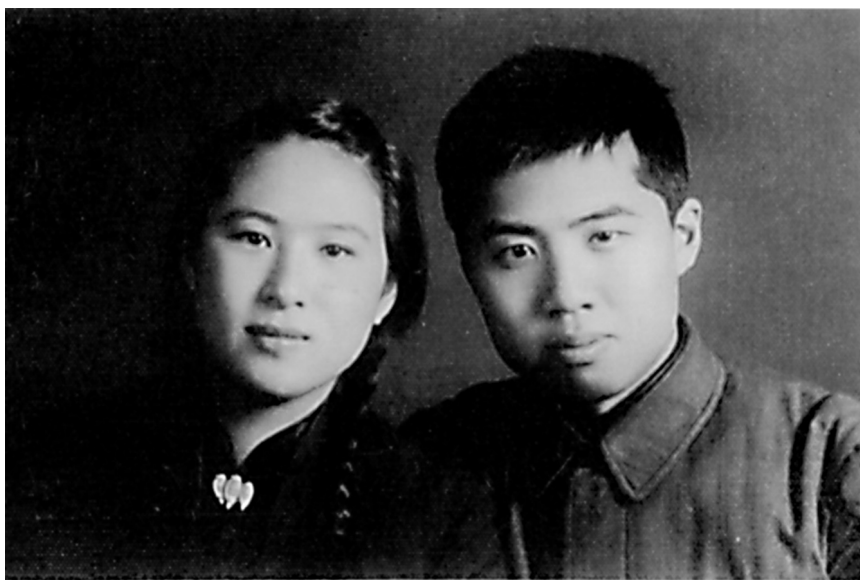
## Part II

# A Gender Questioner

## The Fiction of Zhu Ti

Naturally, I do not actually oppose man and woman living together, but I am attempting to address how that lifestyle can finally be made more reasonable, and how to organize its arrangement.

Zhu Ti, “Preface to Cherry”



Zhu Ti and Li Zhengzhong, late 1930s.



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## 2 Preface to *Cherry*

Here, I cannot contain my happiness.

From the start of my second period of writing – if those past writings that moved me were to be collected into a volume, it can be said that they are my early writings – until now, it has gone past only two full years. In these two years, besides the pieces of writing that I wrote contained in this collection of fiction, there is only the essay “Dusk Field of Vision” (14 sections) and the poems “Sailing the Sea” (6 stanzas) and “Grey Flock of Sheep” (2 stanzas). Not more than just these few could make one humiliated.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, I am not writing something to self-appoint myself to the stream of writers. It is really a matter of the utmost happiness for me that there is someone willing here and now to print a collection of my fiction.

I remember when “Melancholy on the Mighty Black Dragon River” was published in a northern journal. Following the publication was “Words from the Author.” I once explained my characteristic attitude toward writing in this way: “In the future, I am prepared to let loose my spirit of adventure and find a way for me to go into writing.”

This kind of new enthusiasm for once-questionable writing is motivating me to re-energize; it gives me an absolutely intangible debt to my writing classes. Being unable to repay that debt is painful to me, costing me quite a good life.

At the same time that “Melancholy on the Mighty Black Dragon River” was published, a certain gentleman editor in correspondence by mail once expressed his opinion:

The charm and creative concept of such very beautiful writing – if I use the insightful prose of my compatriots to say – can really attract readers. Toward your descriptions of nature, writing the great plains of Manchuria, the scenery of the rivers, I felt a cordial partiality.

Following that, a certain gentleman critic in *China Review* also once published a review about the writing. In it he specially appraised it as follows: “This story has a lot of local color.”

As a matter of fact, when I wrote “Melancholy on the Mighty Black Dragon River,” in addition to portraying a strong native place flavor, I also had another little consciousness. Undoubtedly, readers of this volume will immediately

recognise this kind of consciousness in the novella "Cherry," where it is more clearly carved on the surface. From start to finish, I feel that it is a huge insult to a woman's intrinsic self if she must rely on a man to provide for her. Naturally, I do not actually oppose man and woman living together, but I am attempting to address how that lifestyle can finally be made more reasonable, and how to organize its arrangement. A man and a woman living together is the singular ever-evolving artery of humankind. However, in order to fully be a woman, from start to finish one must have the self-awareness and ambition to be able to live independently – only in this way can one accomplish a woman's intrinsic self.

Apparently, the last chapter of "Cherry" was lost due to excessive carelessness because halfway through the progress of the story, I became quite sensitive that it would be confused with many famous stories because of the narrow path that the story develops in. I am unwilling to step on the footprints of our predecessors, although I do not actually appear to avoid, or to be afraid of, venomous snakes and scorpions. My mood is this – "Find my own way by myself." I have to say that this is the immutable side of my attitude toward writing.

"Dreams and Youth," from a certain perspective, has the earliest embryonic form of "Melancholy on the Mighty Black Dragon River." If it can be said that "Dreams and Youth" is the first part, then "Melancholy on the Mighty Black Dragon River" is the second part, and "Cherry" is the third part. This is how my writing mood developed. So, each of them is inevitably connected, with many related similarities. I do not object to loading this point up with trivial details in this public declaration for people who read this volume.

And "Shooting Star in a Distant Sky"? I cannot clearly remember my state of mind when I wrote it. This writing does nothing more than illustrate the suffering of a woman's love! At the same time, here, I give men's docility and cruelty a quite appropriate appraisal.

I wrote "Me and My Children" last fall. After it was written I put it aside for a long time. A few days ago, I rummaged it out from a box and, along with the others, entered it into this volume. Now I still cherish this thing endlessly. How much I yearn for that group of children, and I continue to present in both hands my blessings to them since I parted from them, which naturally can be blamed on me. I willingly accept all the severe criticism imposed on me by my conscience. But do I henceforth actually have to let go of my previous fond clandestine missing of the children? It is still necessary for people with mouths and eyes to scrutinize my future trends and give me the evaluation that you are willing to give me!

"Joy of Life" was written in response to a solicitation for literature. Due to the limitations of the word count, this story could not be fully developed, but I believe that here I am indeed experimenting with tapping the potential of unearthing a bundle of strengthened, searched-for wealth that is interspersed with memories from some of my past journeys.

Last year, when I arrived in Xinjing, my family lived near a prostitute lane. There, every day there were girls singing outside my window. When I walked outside, they and I would chat, their lives would use their mouths to tell me all, one by one. "Little Yinzi and Her Family" and "Little Scene of the Neighbors" are

just little portrayals of their lives. Naturally, I am quite sympathetic to these girls. I always think of them as good and kind. So, perhaps my pen cannot avoid shielding them.

Like this, writing an explanation of a frame of mind is something that smart writers do not do! I have now written so much and in such a disorderly manner, supposing perhaps that it might help those who read the volume to clearly explain every question in the volume. Then, can it be said that this is a complete waste?

My attitude to writing, as clarified earlier, from start to finish, is that I am engaged in an exploration of my own individual character. When I wrote these, twinkling in front of my eyes was just my own thriving aura. This makes everything outside of me appear dim and pale. I wrote of the depression and determination of many women, just as if I had written down a record of my own depression and determination.

Buddha said: "All people return to me. One part of the road is sacrifice, another part of the road is achievements, and a further part of the road is toil." Although I am not a disciple of Buddha, if I will inevitably hasten back to the way of literature, what way shall I use to walk through it? If it is my own selection, then I only wish to walk the literary road with unceasing toil.

To think back to the time last year when I wrote "Melancholy on the Mighty Black Dragon River," in those times I was still together with my parents, brother, and sister. Waiting now for this volume to be compiled, they toss and turn in the Central Plains, while some remain in north China. They all left me to go so far away, to make me invariably long for them; at the same time I am unable to meet them. This only motivates me to make an endless, even more determined effort for them. If this book can be delivered into their hands, perhaps their happiness is even greater than mine! I am willing, in the far north, apart from enjoying my own happiness, to duplicate and share a bit of their happiness.

The pen stops here for my preface.

10 a.m., 22 April 1944

## **Note**

- 1 These writings are translated into English at: <https://www.manchurialiteratureculture.uoguelph.ca/>

## **Work Cited**

<https://www.manchurialiteratureculture.uoguelph.ca/>



### 3 Dreams and Youth (1943)

#### Zero

Ah, the boundless and indistinct river's water, the boundless and indistinct night!

Night on the river is so peaceful, so silent. White-colored waterfowl sleep on the sandy banks. There is no-one, not even the shadow of a small animal after a herd of sheep walked through. Beside the riverbank, a delicate willow tree forms a shadowy veil. Nothing can be seen. All is as if thrown into a black net.

The far-away watch light, at times on and off, flashes in the dusk light...

It is really late at night!

Just in this depth of night...

Sasha runs out of a familiar dilapidated doorway.<sup>1</sup> She struggles to get away from a palm that tightly grasps her shoulder from behind. She does not say anything. With the utmost perseverance she refuses the call of her man. She runs out of the door without thinking.

She escapes a man's shadow, her white shirt fluttering. How is she? She cannot even make out the road in the dark.

A cool wind from the north blows on the river. Ah, the black river's water rushes like a long snake!

#### One

Every dusk, every early autumn evening.

The sun gradually falls toward the distant mounds, as a flock of sheep returns to the railings. Sasha is alone carrying a jar full of milk. With a desolate whistle she walks along the riverbank.

The quiet river's water, a quiet dusk.

Sasha carries a mournful soul; her eyes fill with wet tears. The flood of youth's feelings, that gives Sasha the torment of eternal suffering, seals Sasha's love-to-talk mouth.

So, from Sasha's lips hangs a desolate whistle, it rings all over the riverbank at dusk every day.

Sasha tries to remember sentences from a poem:

...

*Autumn tears drip from dreams,  
From dreams, I mourn.*

...

*Now just mourning the passing of time,  
Ah, mourning the passing of time!*

...

*One day my heart will lose its brightness,  
One day the sky will lose a galaxy.*

...

...

However, Sasha dares not recall further. Ah, Sasha's heart is a six-string *qin* that cannot bear to be played and caressed any longer!<sup>2</sup>

Quietly, tears drip from Sasha's eyes.

Autumn, the autumn season arrives. The river's water becomes shallower day by day, the number of steamships passing by declines, inexhaustible grasses grow on the side of the road. They sway, withered, in the autumn breeze. Bunches of great flowers fly upwards onto the river's water, flowing with the waves. The river's water is speechlessly quiet...

Sasha herself thinks that her fate is as if it has also arrived at its autumn. Autumn has entered Sasha's narrow chest.

Sasha loves the river's water, loves the river's water more than she loves her own fragile life. Sasha cannot forget the memories that this river's water has left her. She remembers, she remembers very clearly, how she spent her childhood days with this river's water, how she swam with her young lover on the river – and after? Later, for a little jealousy of love, she actually escaped from her family, crossed this river's wide waters, and started to live together with a man who was not in love.

Sasha always thinks like this: Without this river's water, she would have lost some of the most precious memories in her life! At the same time, it would be better to say that it closed a window of her soul!

Ah, how much Sasha loves this river's water! On the way back, she often takes off her shoes and socks, dips her feet in the river's water, and uses her hand to sway the water, contemplating.

At certain times, Sasha can also forget that everything belongs to that old corpse. In those times, Sasha's emotions can so clearly differentiate love and hate. She feels that love will develop in a second new life, in the peace and happiness of a life without restraint. Sasha's youth has become even more beautiful.

Who has not had vexatious emotions? Who can have perpetual peace in their own thoughts?

Ah! Before long, before long, Sasha seems to wake from a dream. Who ripped Sasha's dream to pieces?

## Two

Next, the evening walk back from the pasture.

The small road is so quiet again. The river's water also flows peacefully, the moonlight this night is very good. Walking along the path, the light of the moon sprinkles on the faces of pedestrians.

In the distance, once more there is the sound of a guitar and singing in a low voice.

This night is so beautiful.

But walking, listening, Sasha forgets the man named Jia next to her. A person in pain runs back to a house built by the river, crying.

Sasha feels that apart from crying, there is no way to dissipate again this kind of emotion, compressing her day by day, suffocating and depressing her. She also does her utmost to think, to restrain from weeping in front of people! However, she cannot hold back.

Although it is already late at night, they are not asleep.

"Sasha! Why?"

"..."

Sasha does not reply.

"Sasha!"

"..."

It seems as if the sound is vast and unfamiliar.

Ah, Sasha can only sob! Sasha's heart is disturbed by mournful visions. Sasha's heart is a desert. No, it is a book of memories, from which something is lost in the pages of the book.

Wanting to drive away the crying emotions, what can be done?

Sasha is only 24 years old this year. She has been a wife for six years, but Sasha's age cannot be considered old. Whether she is old or just suited to the life of an older child is not known. However, these complicated and intractable matters press heavily on her, one after another.

She cannot think of a good way to go, although she is always thinking to find a way. Night, when it is deeper.

Sasha looks at the face of the soundly sleeping Jia beside her and his two thickly lined eyebrows. She caresses and kisses Jia's face, she turns to Jia with all the purest elements of motherhood, burning hot tears drip on to Jia's huge face.

From a dream, Jia is startled.

"Sasha! Are you crying again?"

...

Jia violently shakes Sasha's hand; Sasha covers her face.

"Sasha, Sasha..."

...

"Do you feel like you've lost focus in your life?"

...

Aggrieved, Sasha falls into Jia's arms and cries silently.

An autumn wind, the sound of the river in autumn.

Faraway, faraway, approaching and approaching, Sasha's sobbing can be heard.

### Three

Sasha's eyes redden and swell.

Looking at the sunlight in the daytime, the sunlight that comes in through the withered vines under the dry eaves, in the sunlight Sasha dreams with unclosed eyes.

Sasha cannot push away that memory. That memory once dyed Sasha's dreams. In her dreams, there is a shadow with a pale face, this shadow is forever engraved in Sasha's life.

Sasha went back to her old home village, her old days' river's water, her old days' unforgettable feelings. As before, it was a magnificent sunset at dusk...

The river's water leisurely trickles in her eyes.

A majestic song sounds on the river, it penetrates Sasha's empty heart. Sasha has no misgivings and throws herself into the embrace of the young man.

The boat ripples on the water, as if the passions of two people cannot be contained.

There is no wind. Waterfowl sweep to and fro on the waves, they fly. Long, fine willow branches droop on the side of the boat, then inseparably flickering, shades of shadows pass over the faces of the people on the boat.

Ah, Sasha is so excited and, ah, how happy!

Perhaps this is Sasha's habit and characteristic! Whenever Sasha is happy, she has a premonition of a kind of unsettled fear. Sasha tries her best to use the tentacles of her memory to stroke the corners of the dark grey uniform, the big silver-white buttons. Then, she stretches open two hands and embraces his strong arms, kissing the pale white face.

"Oh, I'm so happy, and you?"

"Don't forget! Sasha!"

...

"It's been one year! Our dreams, our long-term expectations are not just a beautiful fantasy!"

...

Sasha's intellect is very clear, just like Sasha's memory. However, why did Sasha escape from the young man? Why does Sasha not have the strength to complete a whole love?

Sasha is not a disciple of God nor is Sasha a disciple of philosophy. Sasha is always a believer in real life. Sasha only feels that life is a kind of threat, it is a kind of hateful existence. Sasha does not have a bit of courage to ask herself the same question again, and Sasha admits that she had no reason at all to run away.

Ah, but Sasha cannot push away this pile of memories!

Sasha thinks: If crying is also a kind of deserved punishment, then, let the lonely days be handed over to tears!

...

Ah, at the time of death! At the time of death.

"I will just be buried alone in the barren hills."

...

Sasha chants this heartbreaking sentence repeatedly. Sasha really feels the emptiness of life. She is no longer willing to think about anything, no longer willing to do anything. Even her own life detests its continuation.

Twenty-four years. Ah, Sasha's youthful life!

#### **Four**

Sasha cannot stand the temptation of a new life. Sasha also does not have the strength and courage to retrieve the stories from lost memories of the past.

Does Sasha really love Jia? This only Sasha herself knows.

These days, Jia is more worried about Sasha. To make Sasha happy, he bought a bread-making oven from a town hundreds of miles away. They grind the wheat at home into pure white flour and make bread.

On every evening dinner table hot bread and cheese are served. However, Sasha does not eat much at all, she just tastes it and puts it down.

Although Sasha cannot eat, Sasha always gives a forced smile of thanks to Jia. Sasha cannot casually abuse a person. To know one's heart is sad is to also know at the same time that the other's heart is similarly sad.

Sasha thinks that she should love Jia! But Sasha really has no way to maintain the existence of love between her and Jia.

A rift has already formed in the love of Sasha and Jia. Sasha has no way to mend it.

It is the same as with family – if love is lost how can it hold together?

Sasha feels sorrowful that there is no way.

Sasha really feels that her heart has lost its brightness.

Forever, ever sorrow makes Sasha old.

#### **Five**

At dusk, it is not known where the sounds of guitar and singing come from.

Sasha stands in the misty dusk, looking at the distant forest wilderness that gradually dispels its color, there is no brightness. Blurred in the cream-colored evening river mist, nothing can be seen, nothing can be seen clearly.

There is a desolate, low and hoarse tone!

Dusk passes, another long night. Ah, what a long night! Tonight, Sasha feels that life is long and tedious, feels it so long and tedious to be a bit burdensome. What is the point of such a futile continuation?

Sasha knows that she still has a period of youthful days. Sasha looks at the dust-covered mirror. Ah, Sasha feels that she is not old at all! Don't her two cheeks still have a fresh red-rouge color? Her blue eyes also contain deep feelings.

However, the life of youth will also wither.

What is a dream? Sasha quietly asks herself. Sasha's face pales. When the oil lamp is lit, the lamplight slightly illuminates Sasha's face, making it even paler.

Sasha's heart is very calm and peaceful...

Night, it is deep again.

A flare of lamplight bursts. Sasha seems to see a flame of life start to burn in front of her eyes, so Sasha can no longer think deeply about it. In front of Sasha's eyes,

there is no ferociousness and there is no terror, there is a halo of intermingled hope and despair...

Sasha runs out of a familiar dilapidated doorway. She tries her best to break free from a palm that tightly grasps her shoulder from behind. She uses her greatest courage to reject the call of her man. She runs out of the door without thinking about anything.

Outside the door is thrown into the dark again.

The boundless river's water, the boundless night. Ah, a cool northern wind sways the boundless long black snake.

Year 10, spring, at home in Jilin.

Originally published in the *Chinese Osaka Daily* (1 April 1943)

## Notes

- 1 The character's name in Chinese is Shaxia. In Russian, Aleksandr is one of the rare names which have masculine and feminine variants, in this case Aleksandr and Aleksandra for a woman. Their diminutives though are the same – Sasha, Shura, and Sania. I thank Olga Bakich for this insight.
- 2 A *qin* is a seven-stringed musical instrument, favoured by the educated for its refined sounds.

## 4 The Joy of Life (1944)

*Filled with deliciousness, ah, happy hidden fruit!  
I know, for new sprouts to grow, you must give yourself up!<sup>1</sup>*

Gide

Tonight, loud song notes float out of the hall.

Such a touching, warm lovers' melody.

The hall is immersed in a kind of excited emotion. The ceiling sparkles with man-made lights of stars and the moon. Everywhere on the walls are installed delicate candlesticks, with yellow, red, and other different pigments, illuminating every guest's complexion as they wildly enjoy the pleasures of youth among alcohol and women. Every gap in the hall is permeated with harmonious laughter, a melody that dances like a dream.

Waiters in white hurry to and fro.

Mala sits alone on an empty seat and silently lights a cigarette. From a mouth coated with thick vermilion ointment, smoke rings gather and scatter. Although she sits in a corner of the hall, it is as if she does not really seem present. Tonight, Mala finds herself immersed in a kind of incomprehensible thought. For no reason, she feels the joy of life. Looking at the gradual start of the hustle and bustle, and the frivolous forms of the guests all around the dance hall, Mala's eyes emit brightness like water...

Then, low-pitch tones turn into loud and clear, fiery waltzes.

Pairs of dancing partners hug on the bright dance floor at the center of the hall. Long white skirts and blue evening gowns sway, stepping to the drunkards' melody, suppressing faint breaths, seizing the gradually closer numbness of pleasure and stimulation. Since some of the lights are extinguished, the flowing emotions carved on everyone's face cannot be clearly seen, the outline of the hall becomes so blurry and fascinating. But the ceiling's flashing lights of the stars and moon indicate the emotions in the heart of everyone on the dance floor. Crazy embraces, crazy twirling, tempting flesh, provoking colors. The dancers cannot at all make out the position or weight that each person occupies in this time and space; it just feels as if the entire hall has fallen fully into a kind of deep sleep state. Countless lights sway, and so do countless women's lips and gentlemen's short moustaches. The numbness of many emotions weaves a great web of dreams, every person in the

great web abandons oneself, enjoying a bit of happiness that is strangely comfortable and strangely dizzying...

Sweat drips from the musicians' foreheads, a black baton waves.

Soon the lights come back on.

A little wearily, Mala walks back with a man's support.

Tonight, Mala cannot help but start to loathe this hall. Who knows the reason? Mala has been here for so long and never had any feeling of disgust.

Liuye, who sits next to her, quietly uses her toes to touch Mala's foot.

"You see that immortal demon, he already asked me to dance with him three times, and still, he looks for me, still he looks for me. A happy, smiling leathery face, it's really disgusting!"

She speaks in a tender tone to cover up her lost youthful years.

"Is it..."

"Ugh, however, don't look at his appearance, his financial situation is very well off! You see! You see, sister Mala."

Following the stretched-out finger, Mala sees a glossy lavender ring covering a gaunt forefinger.

Mala slightly nods. Mala finds that she is fed up with her profession.

"Well? Ah, can't you speak!"

As soon as she moves her black pupils, the window of a woman's soul, she immediately makes a funny grimace.

"Oh, I know. Are you waiting for Mr. Lin?"

Mala still does not answer Liuye's question. Mala is thinking about something in her heart.

"Look, isn't that Mr. Lin sitting there, staring at you?"

Mala stands up. A warm palm rests on Mala's shoulder. In her flimsy gauze shawl, Mala feels the warmth of life given to her by another.

Talking in a ring of light, Mala can clearly see Lin Feng's face. "You are late," she says, with a little reproach and a small display of affection.

"Yes, I am late."

Tonight, Lin Feng's clothing is striking. What Mala finds especially striking is Lin Feng's pure red necktie. This necktie makes Mala remember a same kind of evening a year before, when she and Lin Feng had become acquainted for the first time. Even though that first love was an instant of uncertainty, an indelible shadow was locked in Mala's heart. Mala reviews the hardship of memory, subconsciously with some dejection.

"Why are you wearing this necktie again?"

She uses her hands to straighten it for him. This is still what Mala most likes to do for Lin Feng, the same as she likes washing Lin Feng's dirty hands.

"No reason at all."

Lin Feng's complexion pales again. From time to time, he deliberately avoids the fixed gaze that Mala throws at him, as if there is some secret worry gnawing at his heart and that he cannot frankly tell Mala, who is before his very eyes. Mala's age cannot bear the worry and grief.

She swallows a mouthful of bitter coffee.



When Mala, half-leaning on Lin Feng's shoulder, walks onto the dance floor, the lamp lights from the hall's corners dim. Although the night outside is already so deep, the lingering dancers, still as before, swirl in the indistinct music. It is as if this group of people cannot suffer tomorrow, like there will be no fate for them tomorrow.

Mala gently presses her lips close to Lin Feng's face.

"I don't know why. Tonight makes me so restless and agitated. I seem to be annoyed that something unfortunate will develop. You know, my annoyance is often very accurate indeed. Don't think I'm superstitious. The first annoyance made me lose my father. The second annoyance took away everything in my family and beyond. This third annoyance..."

Her voice trembles a little.

"Mala, don't believe this. God blesses all good and kind people. Your fate cannot be more tragic because, Mala, you're already a person who has walked out of a tragic fate."

No matter what the explanation, Mala's heart cannot really be at peace.

Mala looks at Lin Feng's eyes, with such a sharp, flashing light, and just thinks that this person, Lin Feng, will sooner or later disappear from view. Mala has thought this for a long time. Now, deep worry brings Mala's imagination even more to life.

"Feng, are you happy at work?"

At the same time, she holds her body tight to Lin Feng's chest.

"Hm, also good."

From start to finish, she has no interest in conversation. Mala opens wide her sorrowful eyes, looking at the brilliance of the stars and moon on the ceiling. She feels her real life to be as dull and empty as they are.

All night long watching others laugh heartily, allowing others to deride and fool her... A year's worth of time has been consumed here. Mala starts to reflect upon the weak points of her life. Mala loathes this place, and loathes these crowds who are dazed all the time...

Mala herself thinks like this and thinks again.

Mala's heart is bitter.

From the dance floor, they return to their seats. Mala lights two cigarettes, one for Lin Feng and one for herself. They look at the ribbons of smoke flying from the two cigarettes winding round and round in the air, and flying out into the bright hall.

"Mala.?"

Lin Feng tosses his cigarette butt, his eyes still looking at a lighted lamp post.

"What?"

All of Mala's thoughts disappear when Lin Feng calls her name.

"You won't know why I've come tonight." Lin Feng suddenly turns his face to Mala.

"I, I don't know where your words are coming from."

Mala's heart beats fiercely.

"I came here on purpose to bid you farewell. Mala, you must forgive me; I probably shouldn't say these words to your face and make you sad. But, Mala, I also

don't want to leave here quietly behind your back. For me to keep our promise, I'm also not willing to do that. So, this evening I have run over again to say farewell to you. This hall, this chair, these lights, this crowd of human shadows, I'm not a part of any of them. I know this is the last time. And also, just pretending to laugh and dance with you, Mala, how sad my heart is!"

Lin Feng hangs his head sorrowfully.

"..."

Wanting to speak, yet not waiting to open her mouth, Mala falls into extreme sobbing. Mala understands that this misfortune was predestined. No-one is permitted to escape the influence of fate. No-one has ever been forgiven by fate.

"I too intended to form an ideal family to pass our years. But, Mala, this kind of dream has been completely shattered recently. Except for feeling regret, we no longer have the ability to realize these dreams. In addition to personal happiness, there is also the happiness of even more people; for the happiness of even more people, we should give up on ourselves!"

The enthusiasm of youth burns in Lin Feng's chest, melting his heavy emotional entanglement. It makes Lin Feng rush out of his own world because of accepting the call of many people who he knows and those he does not. The lives of those people are completely mixed together with Lin Feng's life to form one big group. Their pain is his own pain, and their joy is his own joy.

"Feng, then can I go along with you?"

Mala's begging expression is communicated to Lin Feng through her eyes.

"You, you cannot."

"Why?"

"You still need some happiness. You still need some habitual enjoyment. You cannot suffer, nor can I watch you suffer. What you want is an abundant material life..."

"Why can't I suffer? Why can't I suffer? ..."

"Mala, there is no reason for this. You should know your own occupation, your own environment, your hobbies, your physical strengths, your everything. When you obtain them, you scorn what noble enjoyment is, but once you lose them, you cannot live happily..."

She cannot wait for Lin Feng to continue talking.

"Feng, you insult me! You insult me!"

Drawn by Mala's loud shouting, the fanatical dancers on the dance floor gaze toward them, apparently for disturbing their muddled, mad mood.

Lin Feng helps Mala up to the balcony beyond a screen.

All around is quietly sunk in sleep. The night wind blows the sky's canopy of stars.

"Mala, wake up a little bit."

Mala lies in Lin Feng's arms and opens her dream-like eyes.

"I understand. Feng, I just misunderstood you. This night is very beautiful, I'm completely awake. I know, I shouldn't use feelings to pin you down again. To do that, I would be sinful. I would be sinful."

The first tear drips from the corner of Mala's eye.

"Mala!"

Lin Feng kisses Mala's forehead, and dripping tears roll onto Mala's hair. Lin Feng loves Mala too much. Of course, in the past Lin Feng also loved Mala, but this time he cannot say why he feels that Mala is even more loveable than before, especially her pure heart...

Quietly, no-one makes a sound.

As if in the distance, a dance song starts to be performed with an instrument and then stops for a rest.

Countless lights are extinguished and burn again...

Ah, how deep is the night!

Night, when it is deep.

"Mala, I'm leaving," Lin Feng helps Mala up and whispers to her like a stream of water.

"Feng! ..."

Mala's two long white arms are like two snakes, tightly wrapped around Lin Feng's body.

Then, Mala pushes him away.

Lin Feng looks repeatedly into Mala's face, staring at Mala's black pupils. Resolutely, he turns his back and walks toward the hall.

The hall is still overflowing with a crazy mood. Fluttering closed eyelids, she wears a ghostly smile...

Mala stands still for a long time on the balcony and watches Lin Feng walk out the main entrance of the dance hall.

"Feng!"

This low and hoarse call is gently blown away by the night wind.

Mala watches Lin Feng's back as he disappears on the path beyond the garden. In Mala's heart, something has been lost.

Ah, a memorable evening!

Mala opens her eyes to the boundless deep night. She thinks – this person, Lin Feng, will not be swallowed in front of her so lightly by the night. In this boundless night, Lin Feng is no less than a burning pine torch...

Now, Mala is left alone.

She waits for her head to clear. She thinks to herself: why can she not go with Lin Feng? Why should she casually discard herself in the ditch of life? However, as Mala continues to think about the vicissitudes of her life, her unreputable profession... She remembers the embraces when Lin Feng was in love and all of it feels like they have defiled and destroyed one's emotions.

Sitting on an armchair at one side of the balcony, Mala holds her head and cries bitterly.

Not knowing how much time has passed, Mala sleeps soundly on the armchair, curling up her body, with one hand stroking her head.

The night wind blows on Mala's hair and her face...

In a dream, Mala sees Lin Feng board a train, Mala follows him, but she cannot find Lin Feng again.

Anxiety, agitation, restlessness, disappointment... are all kneading Mala's pain.

Mala has no alternative but to get off the train.

The train starts. From the train window, Mala sees Lin Feng wave his hand to her, flashing a smile.

Mala cries in a daze.

Mala feels that she was abandoned by her lover.

Mala feels that this is the biggest shame a man can bequeath to a woman.

Mala is unwilling to be reconciled.

...

On the armchair, Mala little by little turns over her body and changes position.

...

Mala sees that the “closed” notice of the dance hall is displayed. Mala also sees how many pairs of eyes flow with tears, how many begin to sink into poor coolie lives. Everyone starts to rove like refugees.

How many distant dangerous and difficult mountains and rivers have been passed?

How many days of starvation and suffering have been lost?

Mala cannot remember clearly. Mala only remembers that in order to capture her lost life, she has to offer all of her strength. No crying, no sorrow, forget all that suffering ahead in life.

One day, Mala drifts into a small town.

In this small town, she encounters a youth. Him, he is the Lin Feng who Mala misses endlessly.

It is him. It cannot be wrong! However, the serious meeting deters Mala from pouring out her feelings of love. Mala does not dare believe that this is the Lin Feng who is her soulmate.

Mala can only use silent work to rejoice in this dream-like encounter.

With excited emotions, Mala makes great effort at her work.

Mala feels that only through work can she get closer to Lin Feng.

...

In the end, Mala sacrifices herself.

Mala has a moment for one last gasp for breath! Mala feels that there is someone is tightly embracing Mala, calling Mala’s name in a low voice. Mala opens her eyes from in a stupor and sees clearly that this person really is Lin Feng.

“Mala! Remember this person, Lin Feng?”

“Thank you, you taught me to complete myself.” Mala says forcefully.

“Mala! Don’t you hate me?”

Mala shakes her head and is already speechless.

Lin Feng’s eyes fill with tempestuous tears...

Mala’s hand grasps Lin Feng’s hand.

In the twinkling of an eye, Mala’s world is so peaceful. No pain, no fear, no restlessness...

A vague happiness transports Mala’s life to ascend...

...

When Mala comes out of the dream, the sun shines on Mala’s face.

Mala looks contemptuously at her surroundings. The smell of alcohol drifts over the glasses, bottles, tables, and chairs that clutter the hall. On the ceiling of the hall, there are a few lamp bulbs, covered by black iron panels that have lost their brightness...

Mala says to herself: Do not fail to live up to an enlightening dream – a great life calls. Face and vigorously go out into the great era!

Mala faces the rising sun in the early morning, as if clearly seeing the road to her future set there, facing a resplendent daybreak.

“Oh, sunshine that gives me joy, give me courage!”

Mala calmly stands up.

10th year, early September, travelling in Xinjing.

## Note

- 1 The quote is attributed to Gide, but with no reference. André Paul Guillaume Gide (1869–1951) was a French writer, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1947.

## 5 Shooting Star in a Distant Sky (1944)

### One

The sail is raised.

When the third steam whistle sounds, the black iron anchor quietly leaves the water's surface. Sampans scatter. All preparations to depart from the port completely stop.

The body of the ship trembles a little.

The people seeing passengers off start making different tones of loud calls, tightly holding paper streamers, as if grasping the travelers' footsteps, as much as possible to greedily seize this time.

At last, the ship leaves the wharf.

Madan sorrowfully starts to read a poem:

"I see you off,  
Girl, you are  
A shooting star in a distant sky  
You packed up  
My dreams  
My understandings  
My ardent feelings  
Never to meet again  
I am a worm  
You are a shooting star  
Never to meet again  
I am a water bird  
You are a heavenly wind..."

...

Madan looks at the vast blackening seawater, and silently says a sentence, words buried long in her heart: "Mr., I can hardly forget you!"

Ah, the expansive scene in front of her kneads this girl's chest!

Madan really does not want to go like this to the high seas. Madan has exceptional feelings that make her love that person even more.

Madan watches the graying faces, on the pier.

"Still, I don't want to leave you."

...

Madan feels that her fate was destined.

"Today, I can clearly tell you – I only need a word from you and I will stay by your side. Yes, I only need a sentence from you. I believe you. I feel that if I do not sacrifice everything for you, I will always feel that my life is missing something."

...

"Why are you so silent? Can't you say a few words like usual?"

"But, child..."

The poet's face starts to pale.

"Love has no end. We already have so many firm and solid memories. Even so, are you still restless?"

"Yes, happiness often disturbs people too."

"People who abandon the brink of happiness can't understand real love. But, Madan, you arrange a beautiful dream in your eternal youth, so gentle and soft, so constantly beautiful, so resplendent, and so mystical. Oh, Madan..."

Madan does not listen anymore.

"Don't fiddle around with your words and phrases anymore. Don't you know that the ship's departure time is coming?"

"Maybe it will. But, Madan, why are you so sorrowful and anxious? You see, this sea, this mighty ocean..."

...

"If on the night sea, the moonlight rises..."

Using her hand to support her body, Madan leans on the white lookout railing. The annoyance of despair repeatedly surges in her life. Her chest feels like the sea...

Ah, the pitch-black sea current!

The color of the pitch-black sea antagonizes Madan. It can also be said like this: Before, Madan had no despondent days, but now...? Madan's temperament has corroded every happy appointment, and then gently fallen into a swamp of sorrow with an unknown name.

Madan wants to push these away but, ah, she has no strength!

She says to herself: The past, abandon it all!

Paradoxically, this makes her tears flow. Madan opens her eyes blankly. In front of her is an uncertain inundation of the night's seawater...

At dusk, the wind blows from the faraway sea.

The sea winds strike Madan's body coldly. Madan feels the season on the sea even more.

Sorrowfully, Madan thinks about an unforgettable verse:

"I am a worm.

You are a shooting star."

Sure enough, does a shooting star have a happy fate? Even if it is a very fortunate shooting star, there will be a day, there will be a day when it will fall from the sky!

Madan does not dare to continue thinking of it.

## Two

The second day of sailing.

In the end, Madan fell ill after she came back from a nighttime walk on the bow of the ship. In her dreams she speaks incoherent words that others cannot make out clearly. Not waiting until dawn, others are awakened by her agitation.

Madan has a very high temperature. The most worrying thing, however, is her complete immersion in a dazed state, with an even less clear consciousness. According to the itinerary, for the almost ten days of the ship's schedule, no matter what, a person suffering from such a severe illness will be difficult to deal with.

The ship's doctor shook his head and came over.

Of course, this worried the leader responsible for this overseas song and dance troupe. When seeing Madan dazed for a second night, unexpectedly, he remembered a clever method.

That day, in the time after lunch, news of Madan's illness was broadcast to all passengers. It was said that for a most ample monetary reward any doctor onboard the ship could use their excellent skills to come and save this young girl with a wonderful singing voice.

The news spread very quickly.

This news is heard everywhere on the deck in the afternoon. Knowing Madan's stage name, of course people may delight in talking about it, a young girl with a treasured singing voice. She is beautiful, sick and in danger...

That dusk, a young man knocks lightly on the door of Madan's room.

"I have specially come to diagnose and treat the patient."

This young doctor blushes bashfully, with a smile denoting a lofty nature. Actually, this he explains himself; he has only come to the cabin out of pity for the patient.

Madan continues to lay on the bed in a dazed state.

After making his examination, he diagnoses a mild cold. He then gives her two injections of liquid medicine, and leaves medicine for her to take during the night.

This night, Madan is very quiet.

In the middle of the night, Madan begins to stir, she asks for water and she even eats a snack. Madan feels as if she has emerged from a deep sleep, one so deep that she forgot how she started sleeping.

Exhausted, Madan soon falls back into a deep sleep.

In the morning, the young doctor and Madan meet on the deck. This is the first time Madan has left her cabin since her illness.

"Are you already feeling strong and healthy?"

"So much better. This is all thanks to you. We didn't know each other before..."

Madan leans on the railing and uses a smile to take the place of the following words.

"What can this be regarded as?"

...

A meandering conversation begins.

The young doctor is a brilliant conversationalist. And Madan? Excited to have recovered from the illness, there is no limit to their talking. The two of them pass the whole morning talking.



"Later, I hope very much that we often have opportunities to see each other." It appears that Madan loves such talk.

"If you are willing." The young doctor nods his head generously and walks away.

Madan returns to her cabin from the deck.

Sitting alone, she stares at the sea through the porthole. It is a sunny day on the sea. The sea water slowly dots with white circles. From here, a white seagull flies into the distance...

The calm sea pushes Madan into such deep, besotted thought. Madan sets her eyes on the calm sea.

The faces of many men pass in front of Madan's eyes, pulsating on the sea water, pulsating in the white porthole.

A larger figure starts to sway. Madan is a bit unfamiliar with this figure. After Madan carefully looks at it, Madan realizes that this is the young doctor who saved her. His outline gradually grows immense, replacing the shadow of the poet, and every shadow of a group of people, standing towering in front of Madan's eyes.

Why should I think of him?

This question, even Madan herself is unable to answer. If love is the fermentation of blind feelings, then Madan's love for the young doctor can be explained as a kind of subconscious disturbance!

In Madan's days of gloomy moods, she sees a glimmer of light. Madan thinks: At this moment, if he is a lamplight, I am willing to be a moth that goes to death searching for light.

Madan's heart has such relaxation.

### Three

To celebrate Madan's recovery, after dinner a one-off nightclub of music and dance is specially opened.

At this club, Madan meets a man.

This man is very rich in the art of language. After sharing a few words with him, Madan is immediately laughing so hard that she has to cup her stomach. She even sprayed out the whiskey in her mouth, and it landed on the passengers around her.

Moreover, this man has a very big and tall physique.

From someone else's introduction, Madan discovers that he is the ship's helmsman. It is rumored that this man's bravery causes people to remember forever his past deeds. It is almost as if the sea is his home. At this time, at the table, Madan feels that this person really has such strength to conquer others.

This night, Madan is very excited.

Listening to long-lost melodies, Madan's heart recalls the luxuriousness of her former days' throne of singing. Madan feels this banquet to be nothing less than her kingdom, and that all the men are no less than her ministers and prisoners...

Reveling in the situation, Madan drinks a copious amount of whisky.

Madan drags the young doctor and the helmsman to sit together. Madan herself sits between the two men. The strength of the alcohol spreads through Madan's body.

Perhaps there will never be a happier day.

Two arms tightly wrap around the necks of two people.

Seeing a group of men and women wantonly flow from this corner to that corner, the clamor makes this king-sized dining room feel packed.

The seductive fluorescent lights emit soft, plush light.

The sea wind blows in from the window.

Madan is very drunk.

Walking to the window, the sea water chants a light tone in the night. In the faraway sky, nothing can be seen. Only two stars flash their eyes, lonely on the other side of the sea and sky.

Madan repeatedly feels loneliness and solitariness on the sea.

This is accompanied by a kind of desire that gradually heads to Madan's consciousness. Isn't Madan's age exactly that of a youth? The psychology of adolescence is the most flaming and mutable. Tonight, Madan just feels that the helmsman, this person, is very loveable. Yes, Madan could tell everyone like this: Madan loves the helmsman.

Madan feels that loving the helmsman's courage is like loving the poet's gentleness.

Madan's heart jumps violently.

Madan feels thirsty...

After the band withdraws from the dining room, the lights are dimmed. Through the light of a dim lamp, Madan sees a person standing in front of another window smoking a cigarette.

"Hey!"

Madan raises a hand and beckons.

"You should rest!"

The helmsman's two robust arms tightly embrace Madan's body. Madan weakly leans into the embrace of the man.

Madan has a sort of nightmarish thought: "Where will this person send me?"

A young person's adventurous and curious feelings silence Madan's mouth. Madan distractedly passes several cabin doors and climbs up a ladder. Just as she thinks to take another look at the sea's night scenery, her body has already returned to her own cabin.

Lying on the bed, Madan is given warm tea.

"Oh, I'm so sorry."

The other party does not actually reply to Madan's words.

After Madan gulps down the tea in the cup, sheer fatigue makes Madan close her blurry eyes. Just like this, Madan falls into a deep sleep on the sea in May.

As if in a dream, Madan's veins burst.

Madan's breathing loses its even and orderly pattern.

In the end, Madan completely falls into boundless and indistinct pleasant sensations. Madan feels that everything is being pressed down on her body. Madan wants to use some strength to resist, but Madan does not move...

Outside the window, the breath of the sea quietly blows.

Ah, night on the sea in May!

#### Four

Madan stands alone on the deck.

Scanning the pale sea from afar, the seawater is always so young, so vast, so free. In the sea's peaceful past, present, and future, Madan feels insignificant and at the same time she also feels that she has lost the rush and vitality of youth.

These few days, these few accursed days.

Considering the coming conclusion of the journey, Madan asks herself, "Do I still have the strength to live?"

Madan shakes her head. Madan feels her previous metaphor is not correct. Madan is truly not the open sea. Madan is a row of white wave sprays growing on the sea. Although Madan's life is beautiful, it is too tiny in both time and space.

It is not that Madan does not actually want to sustain her life with hope, but when that hope melts, Madan really does not have the courage to have another path of hope.

Madan loves the poet, but that poet did not truly understand Madan. The poet's fantasy world and Madan's real world are forever separated by a long distance!

Madan loves the helmsman, this man. Madan offered herself to satisfy a desire too, but Madan cannot truly love men's excessive ruthlessness. That ruthlessness makes youth lose its luster and gives a woman an eternal insult.

But what about the young doctor?

Madan loves him. Madan vows to herself to never forget him.

Ah, this despicable, dirty, lifeless love!

Madan finds her own repulsiveness, just like she finds her own beauty, so correct and so clear.

Madness grows in Madan's chest.

"Look, the scenery on the sea is so cherished by people."

It is him. The young doctor has come.

"Yes."

Madan tries her best to calm herself.

Madan looks out to the faraway sea.

"Sir, can I ask you a few words?"

"Of course, okay."

"Is a woman's secret love worthy of respect?"

"Maybe it is."

"Then, what if this woman's love is not just innocent, but is despicable and dirty, recaptured from another despicable and dirty man's hands?"

"Why do you ask?"

The young doctor has some suspicions about what lies behind Madan's questions.

"Sir, steady on. It's not me who asks this, it's the whole of my life."

"Miss Madan, why is your face so pale?"

"But I want to ask you. Tell me, what is love?"

"Oh!"

"What is life without love?"

"..."

Madan hurriedly runs off.

The young doctor stands there blankly. He raises his head and looks at the cloud formations at dusk. The corners of the clouds press on the vast seawater. Stars twinkle in the sky and on the sea.

## **Five**

In this night, people find Madan missing.

On the sea, Madan is missing.

Ah, the pitch-black faraway sky, the pitch-black seawater!

July, Jilin

## 6 Me and My Children (1943)

### One

It is the seventh day after my wedding. I did not submit my letter of resignation to the school as planned earlier. I bicycle to the school as usual.

The early morning weather is fine. It is difficult to get such good weather in rainy April.

Mama opens the black gate for me.

“Today you seem to be in an especially enjoyable mood.”

“Yes, mama, I’m really happy today.”

“Then, is it because you haven’t lost your profession?”

“Well, no. Besides not losing my profession, I didn’t lose a group of loveable children either. They may be waiting for me now, maybe. Maybe they’ve waited enough for me.”

I already pushed the wheels into the narrow doorway.

“But, Ti, after women marry, there are many things that will hinder you. For example, social entertainment in the family, managing life! Especially when you have your own children...”

“Mama, no. Mama, I don’t think that.”

“You don’t think? That’s enough to prove that you’re still a person who can’t leave living in a fantasy, a person who discards reality!”

I step on the bike pedal. I wave to mama.

“Okay, okay! Goodbye! Mama.”

“Little Ti, you should write to Hua today! Write in class – you always have spare time!”

I lightly nod my head and sit astride the bicycle.

On the morning street, I start to race my bicycle. The clear and sunny morning air is swaying; it is as if I feel so young again, it is as if I am alive in a wave of youthful air.

There are rows of men and women walking down the street, young children talking, laughing, holding hands, going around in circles on the street...

The air of youth flows on the morning streets.

A youngest little girl, using bashful and joyful eyes, peers at me. By the roadside, she salutes me and haltingly says to me: “Teacher, are you going to school?”

“Ah, yes, good morning!”

I pass her on my bike.

Many young children start calling out to me, standing on the side of the road and saying good morning. From here, I see again the contours of many faces that have not been seen for a long time. I think again of the children’s ever-growing excitement, although it almost makes me unable to remember which year and which level each child is in. I am so familiar with each of their faces, just like the younger siblings in my own family.

I smile and nod at them as if I have regained something that I had lost. I feel the utmost joy and happiness in my heart.

And maybe, in order to show retaliation for mama’s prediction, I ride the bicycle faster and let it start to sprint on the morning streets even quicker, past many groups of children! The morning wind tousles my hair.

Not too far, my bicycle stops in front of the school.

## Two

Stepping into the school’s administration office is like returning to the hometown of my soul! Ah, what a long goodbye.

The room is quiet. Perhaps it is too early?

I do not know who exchanged the red and yellow dahlias in the vase on its rectangular stand. The morning sun shines on the petals, dewdrops twinklingly sway, stop and linger on the petals.

My desk is covered with a thin layer of dust. On top of it, unclear strokes of words are horizontally and perpendicularly drawn with chalk. Next to those are a few teasing slang words.

I put down my book bag and pick up a handkerchief to wipe them away.

Quietly, someone covers my eyes.

“Who? I guess it is...”

I already hear the scoffing laughter. I know this must be that naughty Du E.

“You guess, and I’ll let you go. Hee hee...”

“It’s you! Du E.”

Along with laughter, Du E’s naughty face is in front of me. Two hands hold my shoulders, sizing me up – seeing if I have a bit of who knows what.

“What are you looking at?”

“Me? I’m looking to see – how is the bride different?”

Eyebrows raised, she pretends to be serious. I think to myself – watch your own virtue!

Du E really starts to get tangled up with me, asking me to tell her things about the first night of my marriage, asking me to tell her about the sweetest and most memorable parts of a new married life ...

At first, I reluctantly equivocate. Then, I start to become a little embarrassed.

“With elder sister, you should stir up so much trouble?”

“I should! I should! A thousand shoulds, ten thousand...”

The words are not finished yet.

"I should do what I should!"

A bunch of people run in, hand in hand.

They all surround me. I am in the middle and even sister Xie Yun actually casually starts to bully me.

"By my word, tell them right away!"

"I won't, I'm not!"

"You won't? Okay, we're going to punish you."

"I won't..."

Without allowing me to finish speaking, a few hands rush to tickle me. I try to hide and hide again, but I cannot hide. Six or seven hands make me laugh on one side and on another side I start to beg piteously for mercy.

"Don't stir up trouble. I'll tell you about it."

"What if you don't tell?"

"I must tell, mustn't I?"

After all, my words work.

I quieten down. What will I tell them? I think, I cannot think of anything again. I run. They surround me again...

"Tell!"

"How?"

"Let me think about it for a while!"

Shortly afterwards, the siren for the morning meeting sounds.

Du E grimaces at me and looks at the old principal who has come into the room. We all smile warmly and run to the stadium.

### Three

The faraway, overflowing hubbub and merry laughter of children gradually approaches me.

I take out the textbooks and chalk box from my book bag. I stand on the platform again and lean against a large blackboard. My heart does not know why it is so scorching hot. I look at the many quietly open black eyes of the children and I cannot suppress my words.

"You are going to graduate this year!"

"We'll graduate."

"What else do you plan to do after graduation? How about going to school? Take a job? Or..."

They all start to glance at each other.

"Is it possible that you all don't calmly think about your own affairs? Is it possible that you are still like little children having no initiative?"

From glancing at others, now they all silently lower their heads and look at their desks.

"I think that you should have some more opportunities to study. What you have now really cannot handle the needs in your life. Do you understand?"

"We understand."

The eyes of the few children who have already spoken brim with tears. I know, perhaps, in today's situation, such children who are normally willing to seriously study have actually lost the opportunity to move on to the next level of schooling.

Life. I contemplate "life" – this term.

Oppressed and exploited under the wheels of life, it seems that this is not limited to these children. I think about my friends from many generations. I also think of myself.

But, in front of the children, I can never be disheartened. In front of the children, I cannot capitulate to someone. I cannot lightly infect my maturing children with my own troubles. This is a bit of pain for those engaged in education!

"No matter what you plan to do in the future, or what you will all be capable of doing in the future, we do not have to bother about it now. We must still firmly grasp the current stage of life in front of us! Although the road may not always be an easy one, it is important to believe in going forward. Perhaps the road is unpassable but, from start to finish, faith in thorough knowledge of this road must not be abandoned for a moment."

My pulse beats fiercely, and my face starts to redden.

Looking at every loveable face staring at me, I feel that I should not mistreat them at all. I feel that would let down our ancestors. I am thinking, what seems to be between me and my children, it is like there is something worth crying for. Although, perhaps, the children really do not understand me at all.

I would rather the children do not understand me. I cannot help but give a little warm-hearted tender care to the children I love.

"I wish that you should be capable of being a useful person, a good person."

When I pick up the chalk, a young child sitting in the front row starts to stand up. Her name is Feng Ying.

"Teacher, since you want us to be good people in this way, why don't you think more of a way to help us, so that we can really be a good person like you imagine?"

I am a little disconcerted by this child's question.

"What do you mean?"

In front of so many children, Feng Ying candidly replies: "This is just to say, teacher isn't really sincere to help us for our sake, otherwise, teacher wouldn't ask for so many days off for her wedding and make us miss classes. Teacher! If our wasted time is all added up, it should be such a big number! And you actually stayed peacefully in your home until today."

I look at the child's bright eyes.

"But you don't really understand."

"We understand! We understand!"

...

A burst of whistling gives me no chance to explain myself further.

I do not hate this child Feng Ying. Not even, not at all.

I only feel that I have raped my own will. This is something that I have never thought about. If an educator does not have a conscience, or the determination to dedicate oneself, then what worth are their activities? This, I ask myself.

To the group of innocent children, I cannot say anything.



**Four**

I walk through the door of my home.

I am in a lazy mood. It is obvious that I am more tired than usual. As soon as I enter the door, I leave the bicycle on the steps. I pick up my empty handbag and run to my room.

Mama looks at me warm-heartedly and asks...

"What is it? Are you uncomfortable?"

I do not really have a direct answer for mama's words. After thinking about it, I am as sure as if sending confirmation to myself: "I have already resolved, tomorrow I will resign."

A smile spreads across mama's face, as if she has guessed a mystery.

"It's okay to resign. Has the result of my previous words been realized? Once women marry, they change aggressiveness into retreat, and a stand for defensiveness. Even if there is a better opportunity, I'm afraid they'll never be willing to do it again."

I am a little embarrassed and do my utmost to refute her words: "I'm not really as you think. I'm truly not doing it because of marriage."

Mama firmly refuses to let my reply stand.

"Then what are you doing it for?"

I have no way to reply or not to reply.

"I, I just don't want to do it."

Then, I just sit in front of my desk. After resolving this matter, I have such an empty state of mind, making me not want to do anything. I stare with both eyes at the long cherry-red flower ribbon that has dropped from the flower vase. My temporary thinking just stops there. After a long time, I awake again.

I think: Let's send a bit of news to faraway people! I pull open the drawer containing the envelope tubes and letter paper. On the top is a letter that had been sent to me.

The postmark is already blurry, making me unable to identify when or from what place it was mailed. But I feel that the handwriting is very unfamiliar, so I am unable to remember this person.

There are two pure white letter pages, with no lines. I follow the somewhat irregular handwriting to read on:

Dear Sir,<sup>1</sup>

We want you to believe that you are one of the most honorable and happiest people in the world.

You must believe that this is not flattery.

You use your wisdom, use your enthusiasm, use your great loving people's heart to stretch out your hands to save thousands of little living beings from the baneful influences of this world. These little living beings will never forget you. From many like us who are so far away that you cannot think of the place, I silently miss you and bless you. Do you not think that this is the greatest reward that you deserve?

...

Further, I can tell you like this. We this group of little living beings are using our own hands to open the door of our own destiny. Dear Sir, forgive us for the profanity of our little souls!

What we want in this great age is to respectfully present ourselves, even if our strength is inferior. If we have already respectfully presented ourselves, are we still guilty?

Sir, your children cannot forget you.

...

For a long time, an emotional impulse makes me unable to raise my head. My head hangs heavily on the table. I see myself anew in the mirror frame that emits a silvery shine on the table.

I contemplate: I cannot accept the greatest gift. Yes, I have no qualifications to accept it, I refute such qualifications to accept this gift.

However, silently reading a sentence with such strong wording makes me gently cover my face with the letter paper. I feel as if my eyes are fully permeated with piping hot tears.

In this moment, this moment gives me so great a light in my life. I find that there is no conflict between a person's confidence in their love and their career. If one can understand the meaning of their existence according to place and time, will it not be correct to go anywhere?

Thinking, thinking, it is as if I find myself in the center of gravity in a forked road that keeps shifting like the clouds. My chest is turbulent with the greatest joy for the first time since I got married. I run out of my room: "Mama, I don't want to resign tomorrow."

Outside the window is a blue sky. A silver-winged dove flies by.

September 1943, Xinjing

## Note

- 1 It was common for women in positions of respect to be called Sir.

## 7 Melancholy on the Mighty Black Dragon River (1943)

### One

Mama stands still on the deck of the ship, leaning on the faded grey-white railing, staring into the boundless river's water.

Parting the boundless river's water, the facing bank is an expansive land. There, countless numbers of multi-colored houses and villages and pristine plateaus of grassland lie amidst mountain ridges that rise and fall.

Quietly, the corners of mama's eyes fill with pearly tears. The color of mama's face is like the fortress's sky — indifferent and serious. It is as if the teardrops have not gushed out from the bottom of mama's heart. Mama does not feel that this ship is going against the Black Dragon River to advance and does not believe river wind in the night is the most harmful to tuberculosis sufferers.

Facing the wordless river's water, mama crouches like a stone statue.

Who is it that stealthily enters mama's heart?

No matter how brilliant Luli is, no matter whether Luli knows more than others, Luli after all is still quite young. This year, she is just 16 years old. What things can a 16-year-old girl understand? She cannot guess mama's sorrow. And mama? She is not willing to simply hand the young child this grief.

Panic-stricken, Luli looks at mama's face, then she wipes the teardrops from the corners of mama's eyes.

Mama leans over, kissing the top of Luli's golden-haired head.

At this time, dusk spreads heavy on the river, a layer of ivory fog begins to hover, as if locking up this night scene on the river, to not see again the previously viewed red, reddish-brown, and green granite piled into enclosures as cattle and sheep return to a pasture with windmills turning.

Night comes. Mama's heart loses a window.

### Two

Mama has insomnia tonight. In the dining room located at the end of the cabins, a person loudly calls out the kitchen girl's name. This is occasionally interspersed with obscene laughter and calls of the finger-guessing drinking game. These disrupt an otherwise peaceful atmosphere.

Mama's nerves are stretched thin, warding off the sleep she so well deserves. Mama looks out of the window's curtains, watching the night outside. She begins to feel that the night is alluring. No matter the dark sky or the moon that is as narrow as a bean sprout, or the blurry mountains on shore, they all give rise to an unprecedented longing within her. She listens to the sounds of the waves lapping against the ship. Once again, she remembers the many years that she has had no chance to dance the Charleston or Spanish Nights, such luxurious and enchanting melodies. Mama envies those long blown away passionate days. Mama's pitiful memories make her feel much younger.

Luli lies sleeping on her berth. Mama opens the window and sticks her head out, letting the night wind blow through her silvery hair. She loves this so cold and desolate feeling!

In the early night, the ship sails along the river. The motor drags long whitish waves, startling the sound asleep water birds. They fly back to, and land on, the sandbanks along the boundless black river.

Upon the faraway mountains, the crescent moon shines yellow. In the dusk, yellow stars transform into countless devils' eyes – blinking, moving, wicked.

Mama feels a sort of threatening force. Looking up at the sky, looking at the stars, looking at the river's water, memories whisper into her ear. Gradually they stick on her, gradually they flow into her empty heart.

- Speak up! It is alright to relive memories one more time.
- What is there to be afraid of? No one is here. No one knows anything.
- And, how adorable youth was!

Mama has no courage to listen. She feels her whole body stiffen as if something presses heavily on her chest. She cannot breathe.

But what were those old hopes? Mama thinks, but she cannot recall. Perhaps they were just a dream? Or flowers that passed their season. Although her memories still retain a bit of youthful flavor, and life's bounty has not entirely withered away, yet a spring in life is lost, then what is it all about?

Thinking hurts mama's heart.

Mama plucks a face from a memory of long ago – a square face, with no wrinkles, ordinary eyebrows, large lips, and two eyes as blue as the sea. Mama recalls the face and starts to shiver. Mama tries to dodge the disturbance of that face – but it is just like hiding from a beautiful snake. That snake may be beautiful, but it took a bite out of mama's youth.

Mama continues to think.

The handsome face, matched with a sturdy body, wore clothes as well-starched as those of an upper-class gentleman. He was slightly taller than mama, but when mama wore her popular high-heeled leather shoes, they were just about the same height. Mama liked holding hands with him and together they walked on the quiet road behind the village, talking, laughing. In the evening, lying together, mama rested her head on his wide shoulders. Sometimes she slept like that, sleeping with two strong arms around her.

Thinking of this, mama feels her face blush.

What is on the other side of the door? Mama tears herself away from her memories. In front of the door is that loveable river. Mama used to go to the river's bank to wash clothes, lowering her head and staring at the river's water, in a hazy dream. Back then, mama had been very young. What young person does not have dreams? But, later, that handsome face and mama's kind feelings met once, on Christmas Eve. Mama remembers it was just such an evening. The moon was not full as the two leant against the window, looking at the river flowing under dimmed stars. Occasionally, a river breeze blew the dried vines that hung in front of the window. Once in a while, leaves would blow onto mama's face. But then, for some unknown reason, mama turned melancholic.

Right in front of mama, a shadow of happiness fluttered lightly into her life. Her happy days turned into a pitiful love of adventure...

However, mama still has to review this story.

Mama's house was a brownish red. In the summer, when lizards climbed onto the roof, all the dusk belonged to mama and this person. Perhaps she prepared a tasty yogurt or just tea, and they talked like couples do. In the night, she could hear the quiet waves of the river. On her pillow, mama's dreams escaped beyond the fences. Mama felt her whole body bathed in the warm night...

Mama's heart starts beating faster. She feels thirsty. Blurrily, she pops the cork on her hot water flask, drinks a cup of warm tea, and continues to think.

When was that time? Mama cannot clearly recall. She only remembers it was an autumn of one year; a hateful autumn that brought disaster. That handsome face had left mama for more than ten days. Although he went to the coast for business and from time to time sent mama letters telling her to wait for his return, mama hated him. She did not have the patience to bear that lonely feeling of being all alone. The whole day, in deep thought, mama watched the river's water, especially when she felt weakness take over her body. The hate for no reason made mama cruel.

A shadow flashed across mama's window. That shadow tempted mama, as if she could once again experience the pleasures of youth. Then, one beautiful late evening, mama consented to that greedy shadow's demands...

Within such joy, mama's pain was immense. He was a foreigner, and she could not understand a foreigner's heart. Mama regretted her recklessness. She dreaded the future fallout. From then, mama's days of tears and sighs turned into painful months and years.

Finally, the day arrived. The far-away wanderer returned and was frightened by this stranger. What about the stranger? He lived just like all other masters in a little household – domineering. Mama could not say a word. Mama could only use her hands to cover her face and sit in a corner of the house and cry. This did not actually reach a satisfactory conclusion. With all of her courage, mama declared her love for the foreign man. Mama knew that falling in love could drive a person crazy, but she could do nothing else.

It was a moonless night. The river's water was as pitch dark as the horror of death when mama and the foreigner eloped. Naturally this resulted from his encouragement. As he told it, if they returned together, to the other side of the river, they could have happiness forever amidst thousands of acres of rich land,

wealthy capitalists, reputable professions, commerce and accommodations. Mama indeed found it very difficult to live here. Mama saw how this handsome face cursed her. She was terrified that he might do something extreme. To escape, and make mama's heart stronger, in the darkness, she crossed the river's water, running away.

Everything in the foreign country was strange. Since mama first stepped foot onto the foreign land, her youth passed like that of a plantain lily – her head was bent down, withered. Here, there are fields, barns, forests, and rivers, but she does not like it here. Mama's sorrow has deep roots; the deepest melancholy ages her. Hollow lies pile on top of one another, cheating mama. Life here is not that rich. A layer of smoke covers the city. There are no dance halls, no bars, no places worthy of enjoyment. Plus, she misses home cooking; there is only rice that tastes no good...<sup>1</sup>

All of mama's hopes changed into emptiness and lost dreams. Days become a kind of cursed existence for mama.<sup>2</sup>

Before long, little Luli was born. With the birth of the little one, it was very difficult to calculate exactly whose daughter she was. But mama knows. Mama knows that God cursed this child's birth upon her, to make her suffer. But the man does not know. At the time of joy, without thinking, they gave this child his surname and called her Luli.

Luli has a head of golden hair and bluish green eyes.

Mama looks at her and thinks of someone else. Because of this, mama can only cry and feel sorry. She cannot talk to anybody about it! Crying, she passed day after day, gradually driving herself into middle age. Luli grew up with a very even and straight face. Luli's face shape often makes mama look at her for a long time, a long time. Then, tears flow down mama's face.<sup>3</sup>

The year that Luli turned 15, Luli's so-called father died. Mama felt no great sadness; she knows that this is a natural thing. She feels very old. These few years spent upon this piece of land, and the realities that she saw and heard, taught her well. Mama can only say that human nature is cruel! One generation gives way to another and then another generation gives way again. This unending generational change passes without condolences or warm feelings.

Mama is a great admirer of this land's virtue of women being widows. Mama thought, just like this, she can pass her remaining years. This child, Luli, although she is brilliant, she should not rely on that brilliance to live. Mama thinks she should find Luli a man – but not a passionate man – and later mama could help Luli manage a new family. Mama wants to do nothing else.

But, oh no! Racists decry them. Mama has no courage to stand up against them. A woman, a foreign-blooded woman,<sup>4</sup> how can she live among these people of a different race? Now, mama can see that this place indeed is not her native place.

Shedding tears solves nothing. Mama took 16-year-old Luli and left that home. As homeless people with only a little money, they were treated coldly everywhere. Mama and Luli went to the north bank of Little Paris, that international city.<sup>5</sup> Mama could not find any people she knew. Looking at the ground, she recalled the land of bygone days. Mama could not explain it to Luli, she just took Luli downriver on the steamship.

Thinking, thinking, mama's memories wither away. Her eyes settle on the deep dark river outside the window. She falls into an empty dream of boundless loneliness.

The river's water can always raise mama's spirits. She cannot say why it is so but, just like belonging to a big family, it is a great comfort. From the moment they boarded this ship, during the long days, mama leant on the railing, watching the river's water without a sound.

After several days, the river takes them to a small town. They turn toward the mouth of the river. Across the way and beyond is the Black Dragon River. Its boundless water, blue and fragrant, flows along. Mama loves this river even more; it is as if she knows every single drop of water in it. Her sunken eyes bring forth an occasional crystal-like tear. She is so moved that not even a half-broken sail mast can stop the passionate storms swelling up within her!

Bouncing on the deep dark waves, mama uses her delicate wisdom and clever hands to fashion a shadow of her youth and the person who had a smooth face. In the black water, mama sees that man riding in a car, running wild. How loveable, how passionate, how happy. Like a dying person, mama starts to make a wish. She prays to God.

Mama's eyes return to Luli's body. Mama loves Luli! Luli is mama's whole life. But how can she tell Luli? Pride is important, even to a middle-aged person. Mama cannot say Luli's father is another person, another with the same blood as mama. Doing that would hurt the innocent girl's pride. Mama loves Luli and she can't stand to do it. She blames herself and suffers. That is how this old woman will spend the rest of her life.

Mama quietly kisses Luli's forehead.

Mama smells sleeping Luli's breath and feels a little sleepy. Mama thinks: I must sleep a little or tomorrow my chest will hurt. It really is dangerous if the life of a sick person is not carefully nurtured!

She closes the curtains. The noise of instruments in the cafeteria quiets.

Mama closes her tired, moist eyes.

### **Three**

What time is it? Mama has not the faintest idea. The opening of the door wakes her from her sleepy dreams.

Mama knows that it cannot be time for breakfast yet. There is absolutely no way that the female cook has come to wake her up.

Mama, patiently trying to sleep, raises her body and calls out in a stern voice: "Who is it?"

A bulky body tiptoes toward where mama is sleeping and does not instantly answer mama's question. In a low voice, he passionately replies: "Yana!"<sup>6</sup>

The familiar voice surprises mama. She is unable to speak. Is it? Mama cannot believe it. She uses all her strength to open her eyes. But there is no light in the small dark cabin so she cannot see anything clearly. She only recognizes that there is a person's dark silhouette around her bedside.

"Yana! It's me, Motuofu."

“Eh, is it you?”

Mama is suspicious, and asks again: “Is it you, Motuofu?”

“Eh, it is me. You cannot forget me! Maybe you want to forget me!”<sup>7</sup>

It is dark in the room. She cannot see the face of this person called Motuofu, but in her heart she already knows that it is that handsome face that mama had loved and run away from – here, again, sitting across from mama. She feels that this is unbearable. The atmosphere suffocates her.

“What have you come for?” Mama stiffens her face, although he cannot clearly see her.

“Yana, you know, we have been apart for so long, I’ve never forgotten you. Although you abandoned me, I still love you, like the days when we first met. What about now? We’re not young anymore. There’s nowhere that we can find another dream. But tell me, where are you heading now? Yana!”

“I...”

Mama chokes up a little. She thinks of the day that she left her house, thinks of the dead man, thinks of this directionless... But mama’s pride is strong. She will not speak with bitterness. She just must toughen up.

“I am going north and, what’s more, I don’t need you to worry about it.”

“But I know that your home life is not comfortable, I know that he died. Yana, I talk to you now with the heart of a good friend. I beg you to come with me to return to my hometown and spend the rest of our lives together. Your daughter can come with us together and our hometown is beautiful, like before, our house is just the same as before.”

“No, don’t say another word. I tell you that I cannot go back to our hometown. I’d rather die in this foreign land. I can’t go back!”

The tone of mama’s words is cold.

“You’re still so stubborn. You’re older now, don’t torture yourself. Who doesn’t want a warm home? You must remember how much in love we were when we were younger.”

In the darkness, a hand grabs mama’s palm. She struggles free. Her voice is very serious.

“Motuofu, don’t be like this. We can’t bring back the past. I can’t remember anything clearly now. The past is only a hazy memory. We can’t go back again to look for anything in that pile of dreams. We still have tomorrow. We still have real life ahead!”

He does not say a word.

Mama is in a sorrowful mood. She tries to calm herself; she is not willing to go back to that lack-luster love. Mama believes that it would be a sin for a woman to give such a huge insult to a man.

Perhaps it is better to request, with a humble heart, God’s protection.<sup>8</sup>

Outside the window, the colors of dawn gradually appear.

Once again, all can be seen – the river’s water, mountain ranges, forests...

## Four

Today, Luli is very depressed. Her eyes have lost their lustre and emit only a greyish-green light. Perhaps this is because of her sleepless night.



With concern, mama asks Luli: "Child, is something making you uncomfortable?"

...

"Are you sick?"

...

Luli looks at mama with deep sorrow in her eyes. Then she shakes her head. Luli does not like to tell mama anything. This is the first time since she was born that she has a faint feeling of incrimination.

Mama cannot read her daughter's mind. This adds to her worries, further disrupting her thoughts. She cannot think of a way forward.

At the start of breakfast, Luli hurriedly runs out.

A slight headache adds to mama's sleepless night. She lays by herself on the bed, thinking about the miracle of last night. Really, such a chance encounter can be considered a miracle, but what can she do about it? That person constantly uses his words to get at her. So, she really should not let it go. Perhaps there will not be that many days left to be together. Perhaps never again. Then mama should certainly accept that invitation to go back to their hometown. No, mama must refuse 100,000 times. There is no way mama can go back.

Mama thinks: how wonderful if I were still young! Unfortunately, lost youth will never return. Mama's heart chokes. She feels sorry for that person. Love does not have a set direction. One must use strength to protect it. Love is not an insignificant fleeting emotion!

Like this, mama drowsily falls asleep. While she dreams, two tears roll down her cheeks.

In her dreams, mama sees many unpleasant images. Sadness deepens her melancholy. Mama's soul cannot rest.

Mama's life falls entirely into its autumn, a bottomless pit. It is nothing and empty...

Mama's face is drenched in hot tears.

When mama wakes up, the mid-day sun fills the cabin. Luli quietly wipes away mama's tears. Luli has a stressed and worried look on her face.

Mama does not know when Luli returned. She calmly looks at Luli's face, with traces of tears on it. Mama, holding Luli's hands, asks: "Child, are you all right?"

The girl makes no sound; she just looks at mama's face. The wrongly incriminated girl leans against mama's body and begins to cry. A child's heart is the most easily injured. Luli cannot help her tears from falling. Luli painfully grasps mama's shoulders, and the girl's shoulders fiercely convulse.

"Luli, why are you crying? Come, let me see! Luli!"

Mama strongly turns Luli's head toward her, and warmly sticks their faces together. Luli, as if she did not understand that her mama's heart is also broken, strongly lifts her head toward mama, and asks her: "Mama, why do you have to deceive your Luli?"

Mama does not say a word. Her face turns pale white as she feels a despondent premonition, shocking her to her senses. But mama is not going to give up easily.

"Luli, don't talk nonsense! Mama always loves you. When did I deceive you?"

Mama decides to counter with cunning, to move her daughter's heart. Luli calms down and does not blame her. Luli only pities mama and with great difficulty breaches the question.

"Mama, why do you not want me to know my baba? He is staying in that nearby cabin, that person with the little moustache. Such a kind person, mama! Why won't you let me see him?"

"That person with the little moustache, that kind person..." All this churns in mama's heart, wreaking havoc in her head. Mama cannot control her feelings.

"You are crazy. Luli, you're ..."

"Mama, I'm not crazy, I'm not..."

Daughter grabs mama's legs, painfully crying, calling out: "Mama! Today I discovered that the man who died was not my baba. My baba is alive, healthy, and on this ship. He really loves me; he really likes me. Mama, since we boarded the ship, he has closely watched me, and sometimes jokes around with me. I felt that this foreigner attracted me. But last night I woke up and heard you talking in your sleep. Then I knew that person called Motuofu is the one. I see, I finally know that my mama's name is Yana!"

"..."

Mama is speechless. She clasps Luli's trembling body in a close embrace. There is no trace of light on mama's face.

"Today at breakfast, I found that person. It's as if he knew I'd go to see him. He has a lovely smile. He warmly invited me to sit on his bed. Then, he told me how he once loved you, and that he didn't know why mama left on her own. Mama gave birth to Luli, he is Luli's baba"

Mama looks distractedly at Luli's face.

"No, he didn't know, he couldn't have known. Luli! Did he tell you like that? Luli, don't lie to me!"

Luli repeats it all again.

Without any strength, mama lays down. She is dizzy. Things are developing as if they have all been arranged. It may be easy to lie, but it is not easy to pretend.

Although he cannot have known, his words are correct.

Full of tears, mama nods her head towards her daughter.

"Yes, you should know that he is your baba. But he didn't know before."

Daughter opens wide her eyes.

"He, no, baba really said it to me!"

"Then, he must have said something else to you."

"Yes, baba said: We must all return to our hometown! Our home is on the riverbank. Our home is circled by a reef-colored fence, and has fields, a house, a farm, and a garden. Our district has many down-to-earth people living there. Our loving homeland is forever young. Mama, we must go back, go back to our homeland."

Homesickness stirs mama's memories, making her recall an autumn festival. Mama begins to remember white flowers dyed red and shimmering vines. She thinks of a time wandering along the mountain road with the white trees. Mama's thinking wanders aimlessly.

Mama definitely decides to not go back!

"Luli, mama orders you, you are not to speak of this again."

Mama's cold words hold no warmth. Several cruel wrinkles in the corners of her eyes make Luli close her mouth in fear.

## Five

In the evening, the ship sails ahead, burning more coal.

Mama carefully locks the door, with Luli inside. They are ready for a very long night on the river. Mama does not speak. Her eyes let out a strange light, as she stares motionless at the cabin's ceiling.

The little cabin is full of a deep, dead atmosphere.

The evening deepens. Mama makes her daughter's bed, letting Luli get in first. Mama turns off the lamp. Waiting by the window, she gazes at the dark clouds gathering in the evening sky. Not a star can be found.

It is a peaceful night on the river. The river's water flows by in a sorrowful manner.

Suddenly, someone stops in front of the door and knocks.

Knocking on the door, saying lightly: "Luli, Luli..."

A low voice filters through the bottom of the door. Although mama hears it, she does not move from leaning on the window.

Luli slowly raises the upper half of her body, but mama uses her hand to push her back down. Then mama lightly tucks her daughter into her blanket and goes back to wait and look out the window.

Before long, the sounds of footsteps go away. The knocking sound is no more.

Mama wants to sleep but she cannot close her eyes. She feels a little pain in her chest. With a light cough from her dry mouth, mama knows that she has not got long to live.

Mama is not actually sad! Just as leaves cannot be made green again, she is like a fallen leaf, ready to decay!

Something is sticky on her handkerchief. She had spat out blood.

Luli, in a deep sleep, murmurs: "I must go back! Mama! Mama, I'm going back, I'm going back! My baba."

Mama cannot listen to it anymore. Mama uses her hands to cover her ears and then begins to cough relentlessly. She feels something burning in her chest. Finally, she spits a mouthful of hot liquid into her hankie. Mama leans up with her hand, breathing shallowly. Exhausted, she lays back on the bed.

Without realizing it, tears fall from mama's eyes.

The ship moves forward through the evening...

Before much time passes, the ship's horn blows.

The ship sails into the black night.

Luli wakes up for the first time. She feels that her head is hot, and raises her body, thinking that perhaps she is sick.

Today, mama's face is very white – without a spot of color. Hearing Luli stir, she quietly walks over to the front of Luli's bed.

"Child, do you want to get up?"

Her hand touches her daughter's forehead. She looks at her with dull eyesight.

“Ah, your head is hot. Luli, where do you feel uncomfortable?”

Her daughter tries to hold back her tears and shakes her head.

“No, mama! In the night I had so many dreams. I dreamt of a new land, with mama and me together.

Mama opens her eyes wide, without a tear in her eyes!

“Mama, I can’t suppress such a wish. Although I am still very young and don’t understand a lot of things, I can’t control my own thinking.”

Mama rubs her daughter’s hand. Today, her heart is unusually calm, like after the ocean’s waters subside, there is a deep blackness, something that cannot be retrieved.

Mama loves Luli. Even more, mama loves Luli’s youth.

How can she control Luli’s youth? Is it a blank sheet of paper or an empty memory...

Mama understands perfectly that she is aged, and her body is weak.

Mama suddenly, resolutely, holds tight her daughter’s hand.

“Luli, I’ll let you. We can go back to our hometown together. You’ll love your baba forever!”

Luli starts crying, shedding a few tears.

“Mama, really?”

Mama smiles and nods her head.

Mama’s face is even whiter. Then, what about Luli? Luli’s hopes grow. The young girl’s hopes start to grow wings and fly up...

## **Six**

One day in the afternoon, the ship anchors in a harbor.

Many guests come on board, mingling on the deck – old people, small children, footmen carrying big soy sauce barrels, grass bags, dainty women, they all move hurriedly.

That man Motuofu went out on the dock early. Luli happily holds mama’s sleeve. Luli is elated! She imagines many magnificent future dreams for herself. Luli has no worries. Luli looks at the sky, looks at the water, looks at mama, looks at everything.

Everything is lucky in Luli’s eyes, everything is beautiful.

Mama looks coldly at the ground.

Shivering dejectedly, mama feels that the wind from the land is cold, the breeze beats on her chest.

Motuofu diligently looks for a horse and buggy. They will stay in a small town, less than a mile away from here, for several days. Then, they will cross the river to go back to their hometown -- this is the plan that he told Luli.

Mama says not one word.

A horse and buggy are difficult to find. There are many people getting off the ship. Perhaps they will have to wait for a while on the riverbank, wait until the ship sails away. Then they could find one around.

The three of them are silent. Surrounding them, everything is messy, noisy...

The wind pierces mama’s body.

Thick chimney smoke sprays out black.

With continuous smoke, the color deepens.

Soon, the ship will sail from here.

The smoke rings become darker.

Mama is deeply quiet. She turns her white face to the man standing beside her.

"I forgot something, let me go see!"

"Let me go."

Mama refuses his offer. She does not want to prolong such meaningless conversation and fiercely shakes her head.

"No, you wouldn't recognize it. You and Luli stay here."

Mama grasps Luli's hand.

"Child, Mama will be back."

Looking at Luli's happy face shot through with red, her big bright eyes, and her golden hair, mama has no courage to take sight of her again.

Mama hurries back onto the ship. She runs into the cabin and sits there in front of the empty bunk, and bursts into tears.

It is as if mama's heart has lost something.

The ship sounds the departure horn.

The anchor is raised.

The gangway is raised and with it the connection to the land is severed.

The ship begins to sail...

The passengers on the deck wave farewell to this soon to be faraway harbor, with incessant talk of the journey.

Mama mingles amongst the crowd of people, peering at the scenery ashore. Not very clearly, she sees Luli, as if in the center of the crowd, searching for something. And she sees the man Motuofu standing on the dock, not far from the ship, staring.

Mama, in a quiet voice says: "Forget me, old Motuofu and young daughter Luli. I pray that God blesses you both!"

Then mama raises a red handkerchief and waves it toward the bank. Once, and then again. Mama believes that Luli cannot see it, but then who could!

Mama, feeling lonely, looks at the words sewn on the handkerchief: *My beloved Yana, our love is forever, our youth will never die. July 1925.*

Mama uses all her strength to tear up the handkerchief and throw it in the river. It flutters into the river's muddy water, into the wake of the ship...

The ship leaves the shore, moving further out.

Returning to the current at the center of the river, the ship starts to speed up. All the people on the bank, the trees, the buildings, nothing is clear anymore. All are gone in a faraway place.

This big hulking ship again faces and steams toward the Black Dragon River.

Mama quietly leans against the railing.

The wind on the river blows into mama's wet eyes. The wind blows against the thin corners of mama's dress. Ah, the autumn wind!

Does mama not actually love them? Mama denies it a million times. Mama loves Luli. Luli is the pearl of her life. Mama also loves that man Motuofu. From start to finish, mama loves them.

But she cannot go in search of a new life.

Mama cannot help but abandon what she loves and hates. Just then, the call of another life revives mama. She has no power to cast it away, the same as she has no right to refuse it.

“Mighty Black Dragon River, you pierce my chest.”

Mama looks down, and she sees the hope of countless waves, countless waves flowing up and down – the waves of youth. She also sees countless drops of transparent, bright water flying here and there: Under mama’s eyes is a sea.

It is as if mama sees Luli.

She sees that man Motuofu.

She sees that long departed hometown and its full of life black earth.

... In mama’s chest, what burns so hot?

At home in Jilin, November 1942

## Notes

- 1 This is a reference to the general ban on white rice for any but the Japanese.
- 2 The last sentence was in the original publication, but not subsequent versions.
- 3 The words “with a very even...” to the end of the paragraph are in the original publication, but not in subsequent versions.
- 4 “*Yizu xue xi de nüren*.”
- 5 At the time, the Russo-Chinese city of Harbin was often referred to as “Little Paris.”
- 6 Yana may be transliteration of a Czech or Polish name. Correspondence with Olga Bakich, 3 December 2021.
- 7 The sentence “Maybe you want to forget me!” was in the original publication, but not in subsequent versions.
- 8 This sentence was in the original publication, but not subsequent versions.

## 8 Cross the Bo Sea (1945)

[Wild Goose]<sup>1</sup>

### One

Standing for a long time on the wharf at Yingkou, on the bank of the Great Liao River, mama's eyes start to moisten.

The wind blows from the boundless Bo Sea. It is clammy and carries the strong odor of an early tide,<sup>2</sup> as it flings itself toward the faces of mama and child.

Mama tightly grips the child's hand.

She watches the early tide seawater spreading out and receding before her eyes, and the quietly washing away of a row of white spray that flows in and out from gaps under rocks in the sea. Groups of children picking up shells immerse their legs in the water and begin their innocent singing.

The children's singing blends into the seawater's "yaya."<sup>3</sup>

Mama's feelings melt into this scene. She no longer focuses on the unpleasant matter that developed not long ago on the Bo Sea, nor does she want to care anymore about the matter of that vile person who seized the only big blue shirt that her husband had left in her hands and was packed in the two bags that she carried from her hometown. She only feels that there is a kind of strange thing, no, it is a kind of seduction by the view. Because of it, a bright line of despair flashes in mama's heart.

"Ah! This new land, ah!"<sup>4</sup>

Mama grips the child's hand even more tightly.

### Two

Having sat three days and two nights in a pedicab, mama and child arrive at Dagou harbor on the bank of the Sea River.<sup>5</sup> That is a matter of three days ago.

Mama's face is emaciated by travel fatigue,<sup>6</sup> travel-worn and weary, with unbearable exhaustion. Ah, how miserable her heart is! Mama, from youth to now, has not walked so many roads. This time she cannot bear it because she has received no news from the person who traveled far. One year, two years passed and now it has been like this for five years. It is said that he got rich, that he started a business, it is even said that he married a woman from East of the Pass.<sup>7</sup> Most recently, she

also heard that he had violated some control law, was arrested and jailed. The news is very bad...

This news that comes is not very convincing, but it is enough to make an inexperienced and lonely woman feel terrified and uneasy.

Plus, in her hometown this is a famine year. Her life feels helpless. She cherishes the memory of the distant place more fiercely every day. Although mama is not knowledgeable, she still has a bit of firm and resolute courage!

Just like this, mama set up a plan to go East of the Pass.

But, money for the journey? It cannot be said that this is not a big problem. Fortunately, mama gets along well with the people in her hometown village. Besides selling some old, broken home furnishings, the neighbors pooled together more than ten *yuan*. Then mama, one early morning in the spring, when the wood pigeons started cooing, led her own child, carrying two bundles with her home's property wrapped in cloth and left the village where she had always lived.

Mama's love for her native soil is no less than any other's but, in the end, she resolutely stepped onto the road of this alien land. As the shadow of the village gradually blurs behind her, mama's pain can no longer hold back her tears from flowing out.

The child, without understanding, wipes mama's eyes.

"Mama, don't cry!"

Mama dared not look toward the child. When mama looks at the pitiful child, she can remember that the child was just born two months when her husband left. Lonely, mama carried the child through so many bustling days. Sometimes, she was harassed by inaccurate rumors. Every time this happened, she just comforted herself in her heart: Good and kind people cannot encounter God's condemnation! Mama's faith is very pious – mama believes in fate and even more believes in karma.

The long journey gradually makes mama dare not believe her own assumptions. In mama's heart there is some hesitation, as if there is nothing that can be certain. There is no reason worthy for a person to believe, people often use lies to deceive their beliefs.

Mama's determination to go East of the Pass has not changed in the slightest. Mama also once thought this way: Let my husband completely disappoint me! Mama does not want to think about it anymore, just like this she authorizes her own disappointment! At that time, can she not nurture her own child to live?

In this way, mama's heart is much lighter again.

On the evening of the third day, they arrive at Dagū harbor.

### Three

When they arrive at an inn, mama asks the salesclerk in the lobby: "How many times a day does the steamship go to Yingkou? How much are ship tickets?"

The salesclerk sizes up mama and child.

"Are you going to Yingkou?"

Mama has a little uneasy bashfulness. This is the first time that a strange man ever sized her up like this! Mama tugs closer the front of her long jacket.



"Yes."

The salesclerk knows that this business will be another success. With a sly smirk appearing all over his face, he goes one after another through the procedures to Yingkou.

Mama does not care about the rest – she just remembers the clerk's last words: "However, a single woman without a man is not allowed to board the ship here."

This really makes mama so anxious that she can neither sit staid nor stand peacefully. Mama seemingly stands on the edge of a precipice. On the tip of her nose seeps a row of sweat beads.

"Can't you think of a way to accommodate this?"

"Accommodate, I'm afraid this is not easy to handle. Ah, this is an official order! Who dares disobey, eh?"

"So..."

"Of course, there's a way. Listen to me tell you slowly."

The result, the method that this salesclerk thought of, is none other than the popular method near this pier: "Hire a Man."

Mama feels that life has no way out. When mama thinks about the method to do this, her emaciated face cannot hide her shy blushing. How dare mama say that a strange man is her husband?

Does mama not ultimately have to cross this Bo Sea? Does mama not have to go to that land East of the Pass? When thinking about it in reverse, mama perceives that it is time to be patient again.

"So, how much money?"

"This is what I'll introduce to you, I can't ask for too much, in total fifty *yuan* with the ship ticket."

Although this amount of fifty *yuan* cannot be counted as expensive, it already accounts for ninety percent of all of mama's assets. In addition, from Yingkou mama must change to a train! In money and food costs, everything needs money.

In the end, it is resolved. Seeing the pitiful mother and child, he subtracts 15 *yuan* – he wants thirty-five *yuan*. The next morning, before dawn, that man will come to the inn, then they will go together to the wharf.

The salesclerk says that the man is his cousin.

When the salesclerk walks away, mama exhorts repeatedly: "Is your cousin's temperament good? I'm afraid of crude and rash people."

The salesclerk grins and without any emotion makes another fake smile. "Don't worry! Everything is guaranteed by me. You only have advantages. Absolutely, you will not suffer."

## Four

From the moment she steps onto the pier at Dagu harbor and into the ship named *Benefit the People*, a third-class steamship with a strong smell of heavy oil, a man who is about mama's age stands beside her.

His crude manner of speaking testifies to his status. The protruding purple muscles on his face scare mama a little. When boarding the ship, he once held mama's right arm with his left hand, but he encountered mama's silent rejection.

So, safe and sound they board the ship.

But mama's heart cannot be at rest as laying down a stone. Mama's heart is very chaotic and very unsettled, like water flowing from the mouth of the White River, pouring into this Bo Sea Bay with waves constantly rolling over, suddenly high, suddenly low.

Crowded into the chaotic passenger cabin, mama seizes the child's hand tightly.

The time is not long at all when the ship sets sail from Dagu harbor.

Although the clamor quells for a bit, before long the noisy shouting and chaos resumes in the cabin, even greater than before. This chaos keeps mama's heart tightly on tenterhooks. Besides longing for the new land, mama cannot think of anything else anymore. From time to time, the child looks strangely at the man's face. Then, in dread, he hides his face in mama's arms.

Mama strokes the child's face and cries.

That man breaks out a rude voice: "What're you crying for? You're just women after all."

Mama glares fiercely at him.

That man laughs violently. This laughter makes mama's whole body convulse, as if foreshadowing that something unfortunate is about to occur.

The ship sails on the Bo Sea. How many people can leisurely look upon the scenery of the sea? A unique, charming line of the sea stretches out, seagulls belong to the starting point of that charming line of the sea. In addition, water sprays from the spouts of whales, beautiful rock formations jut out of the water, are not these all the materials that can be collected by poets or painters for their artistic perceptions?

But life is too hurried. Life tyrannizes people, without giving every person a lot of leeway to squander. Who can really stand on the deck of the ship and look upon the beauty contained in the deepest part of the Bo Sea?

Dusk on the sea comes early. At dusk, the surface of the sea is even more beautiful, but this steamship is like a prison on the sea. Not one person comes to stand in the evening breeze on the sea, looking upon the afterglow of the setting sun.

At this time, the child is already asleep. Basically, their two and a half people's berth is just a square slab about ten feet long, covered with a thin, grey blanket. The child occupies almost half of the entire berth and mama has to lean her body a little closer to that man.

"Hey!" ...

Mama pays no attention to him.

That man whispers a few words in mama's ear. Although mama is unwilling to listen to his words, after hearing them, she struggles with difficulty to stand up, and looks with imploring eyes at that big face.

Night on the sea has come.

Ah, night on the sea, there is no sound! Everyone has gone to sleep. Who knows what will happen in this silent night? And how many people will fall into the abyss of fate?

No one knows, no one knows.

In fact, it cannot be said at all that mama is too cowardly! On this Bo Sea, isolated and cut off from help, what method can mama use to deal with a man who rapes?

And mama must rely on him to cross the Bo Sea. Mama just must exercise restraint over this! Besides exercising restraint, no other way is in front of mama's eyes.

The second night, the third night, the same agony passes.

Mama totally tolerates him. In the night, when mama loses her sleep, she just quietly prays to heaven: "Heaven, give me back my husband, deliver me to the new land!"<sup>8</sup>

## Five

The third night passes. When the horizon reveals the first bit of morning light, the steamship has already sailed into Yingkou's harbor.

Anchored in the harbor at Yingkou, through the narrow, small, murky grey glass window, mama sees a corner of the piece of land she was expecting in her dreams. Mama's joy makes her blood circulate faster through her body. Mama's heart is so happy it could fly out of her body.

Before long, the customs people come in groups to investigate.

Seeing that mama has a white silver dollar with the portrait of a person, they seize it. Although mama did not relax her hand, in the end their big palms seize it.

"This, this is a violation of the unification system..."<sup>9</sup>

Mama does not understand at all the meaning of these words; in her heart she always has something she does not understand. Mama looks at the back view of that group, feeling indignant in her heart.

Mama does not keep closely questioning this. Mama anxiously waits to go ashore, so that she can run toward the city that is said to be more than three hundred miles away. Mama's greatest expectation is there. From receiving these two days of suffering, she even more ardently longs for the past.

When mama ascends the pier in Yingkou, the man follows suit. His face bulges with purple protrusions. He puts on a satisfied smile; his eyes gleam wickedly.

Mama gives him a stern look, then lowers her head.

"Then, give me my pay!"

Mama wants to get rid of this guy. Then, without a bit of stinginess, she takes from her bosom three ten-*yuan* paper notes and throws them into the outstretched, furry, black-haired hand.

"This is twenty *yuan* short!"

"Didn't you make it clear at first that it's thirty *yuan*?" Mama feels that this matter is getting more and more difficult to handle.

"It's not wrong, fifty *yuan* is the market price. Can I make you spend more than that? Faster! I still have to take this ship with berths to go back."

Mama has only a little more than twenty *yuan* still in her bosom. No matter how much mama economized, the food on the ship cost a few *yuan*. How to handle the debt in front of her eyes?

"I really can't pay the debt. With the little spare money that I have left, I must buy a train ticket! Forgive me Sir!"

"Forgive? Then, since you have no money, I won't embarrass you anymore. Give me these two bundles to take back! When you come back with money, come again to fetch them, it won't be too late!"

Without waiting for mama to speak again, those two big hands seize the bundles from mama's hands, then rush to the steamship docked at a pier. Mama wants to chase them back, but in the end she stops her steps.

Standing still for a long time on the pier at Yingkou, looking at the faraway flowing waters of the Great Liao River, mama's eyes moisten a little.

The wind blows from the boundless sea, dampness mixed with the strong smell of salt after the morning tide strikes the faces of mama and child. Mama tightly grips the child's hand and throws her eyes toward the deep blue, boundless sea.

The sun slowly rises from the other side of the sea. Purple-grey cloud patterns rise.

"Ah, this is a new land!"

At home in Jilin, 16 March 1943

[Algae]

## Six

The north-bound train, carrying a group of passengers who are anxiously looking forward to the development of their future path, has been rushing for a long way on the continent. It surges as if to exhaust itself. No, it is as if it bears its weariness, following the rails forever into the distance.<sup>10</sup>

The autumn wind blows the white smoke spurting out of the locomotive into a ribbon, casting it long toward the vast earth. The train has already gone a long way, but a grey-white ribbon still floats above the September plain.

When night comes, the sounds of the bumpy car wake up the child in mama's arms. He stares blankly at the contours of the strange travelers' faces, one by one. Although it cannot at all be regarded as too dark, the lights in the car burn cold and cheerless, lighting up the passengers' silent faces. The child knows that he has slept soundly for quite a while. Mama and he have already left that heavily fogged pier at Yingkou.

"Mama, it's cold!"

The child pushes mama's hand, and then mama absent-mindedly touches the child's face, which is even more emaciated. From the time of his birth, the child has lost the necessary nutrition. When the child was born into this world, it was at the most unfortunate stage of mama's life. Such a little creature has grown up in this kind of unhealthy dark corner, how can he be blamed for being thin and shrivelled!

Hearing the pitiful child's words, mama feels a little cold too. Originally, mama intended to find something in the little bundle for the child to wear, but she immediately realizes that the bundle has already been seized by that brutal and unreasonable man on the pier in Yingkou. Apart from that bundle, she and the child only have a few pieces of clothing on their bodies. How can they be saved from this cold night?

"Child, is it cold? Wait for ma to open my top to warm up in ma's arms!"

Mama did not hate or curse that brutal and unreasonable man. Mama is only willing to quickly forget him and forget that shadow that made her miserable.

Mama is not willing to deal with him with filthy words, because mama feels that to use such words violates the virtues of being a good woman.

The child squeezes in mama's bosom close to her underwear. The warmth makes the small child look around happily, out of the stained and dim glass window again – look around at the night as black as ink, and little flying coal dust sparks that cannot be seen in the daytime...

"Mama, when can we get there?"

Mama is still absent-mindedly thinking about some questions, which have vexed her for so long. Can he be found immediately after we arrive in the small town? What if he cannot be found for a while? Be a servant? Beg for food? That is completely easy to handle. But what if he cannot be found at all? How should a woman like her, who has never stepped a foot outside the front door, cope with the days after that? And how about the child? The child is young. Perhaps, perhaps my and the child's fates are destined to starve to death on this land of East of the Pass!...

Mama thinks carefully and feels that the road ahead cannot be so narrow and limited. Previously she heard people say that the land of East of the Pass is as expansive as the sea, waiting for people to cultivate it. Even to cultivate the ridges and roadsides that other households have given up is enough for a few people to live on. So, mama has hands and strength, what should she fear?

Then, she thinks again of the meals of tomorrow morning and evening in this journey, which makes mama feel that they are very difficult and embarrassing. What can the only two *yuan* she has left in her hands be worth? At dusk, she spent five *jiao* to buy a small packet of biscuits for the child, only five or six pieces of biscuits. The child himself could eat ten pieces but will still not be full. Besides, the adult is also hungry!

Mama feels a cold breeze blow into the open front of her jacket. She gives a light shiver, and hurriedly covers her clothes with her hand.

"Mama, I'm hungry again."

"Hungry, tomorrow ma will buy you something to eat. Get some sleep!"

"Ah, I'm hungry. I can't sleep!"

"Good child, listen to mama's words, go to sleep! Tomorrow, at dawn, ah, mama will buy you something to eat!"

The child, half-believing, half-doubting, nods his head. Looking at the car window for a long time, the child is also bored of looking. It is forever a black window, with little bits of sparks flying outside. The child blankly thinks: Ah, this place East of the Pass is so different from my hometown! Sitting in the hometown cart, why have I never seen such a black window, such sparks like fireflies?

Finally, the child falls asleep again in mama's arms.

Mama herself is left awake. Mama wants to sleep but she cannot sleep. Mama fears that the child will suffer from a wind chill. She uses her two hands to tightly embrace the child. A cool breeze continually makes inroads on mama's bosom. Mama keeps her eyes open to guard this tediously long dark night.

Night, outside the car window, is like a greenish veil that falls toward the horizon. The train whistle gives a sharp cry, perhaps it passed a fork in the road or a bridge! The train then begins to shake. Immediately, the sounds of the wheels echo intermittently, and the train speeds forward.

## Seven

“Mama! I’m hungry! I’m hungry!”

The tomorrow that mama fears, the tomorrow early morning that she fears to see, quietly brings the unfolding of a new journey. Mama is startled awake by a confusion of voices. Outside the car window, the scenery before sunrise spreads surpassingly beautiful. Insufficient sleep makes mama a little dizzy. Mama pays no attention to this little bit of her own pain but loses no time to open the front of her jacket and look at the child in her arms.

The child does not know when he already opened his eyes. The first sentence proposed to mama was her promise that was not forgotten by the child all night.

“Mama! Buy me some biscuits!”

“Biscuits? Oh, Okay. Wait until tonight when your baba is found, I can buy you a large packet of biscuits, good child...”

“No, no. Mama, I’m hungry!”

“Listen to mama! Good child. Look at how much fun that white lamb playing by the creek is having. That red forest, you see how beautiful the red is...”

Mama weakly points at the window, guiding the child’s thinking.

“Mama! Ah, I’m hungry! Ah, I’m hungry!”

Obviously, the child completely rejects mama’s deceptive conversation. The child feels that the hunger in his stomach is uncomfortable, as if something is sucking his belly. His stomach emits a wheezing sound. Really there is no way to endure it anymore.

“Mama! Ah, I’m hungry! Mama!”

Violently shaking mama’s shoulder, the child looks at mama’s cold complexion, and cannot help crying out loudly.

“Mama!.....”

“Child, ah, mama’s also hungry!”

“If mama’s also hungry, why not buy biscuits to eat!”

“Yes, why not buy biscuits to eat. But...”

There is no way for mama to hum and haw anymore. She pats the top of the child’s head, as if venting her grievances to the child, nestles her two cheeks closely to the child’s forehead to give him consolation, and in the end chokes with sobs. Mama quietly calculates the past itinerary. It is already two whole days without food entering their mouths. Mama thinks: To whom can she tell her hunger? To whom to beg? What is mama for? Why is mama immersed in such infinite suffering?

The more mama thinks about it, the more at a loss she becomes.

Ah, the child is a child after all! The child does not understand mama’s thoughts. In the wait for mama to wipe away his tears, the child already loses the mood of crying.

“Mama, biscuits sales, biscuits sales.”

The child points and yells at the vendor who comes through the car door. The car vendor carries a basket, crying out their wares, walking here, walking there. The basket is full of red and yellow paper wrappings.

The elderly passengers sitting close to mama simultaneously chew biscuits and indignantly say to themselves: “How expensive, six pieces for five *jiao*...”

Although mama also knows that things on the train are very expensive, in any case, for the child she has to pay a little. Mama divides the few *yuan* that she has in half and buys two bags of biscuits. One bag is yellow, one bag is red. The packages of biscuits are in a thin bag of colored cellophane.

"Child, you eat!"

The child grasps the biscuits, a smiling mood penetrates his dirty, blackened, tear-stained face.

"Mama, you eat too!"

The child uses a tiny hand to take out a biscuit from the paper bag and puts it beside mama's mouth. Mama twists her head to dodge it.

"No, Ma doesn't eat – you eat!"

"Didn't mama say she's hungry too?"

Mama listens to the child's innocent question, and her eyes gush with glittering, translucent tears. Mama feels that the child's existence is the only warmth in her life, the child is a star in the sky of mama's life.

Mama kisses the child's face.

"Child, mama will not eat this when she is hungry."

"What does mama eat when hungry?"

"Oh, when mama's hungry, it's like this..."

Mama faces the air vent in the window, opens her mouth, and inhales a breath of cool air.

"This will not make me hungry."

The child looks blankly at mama's eyes and forgets the biscuit he still holds in his hand.

"That's just it, I will not be hungry."

The child imitates mama's action and inhales a breath of cool air.

"No, you are a little child. You must eat biscuits to satisfy your hunger. Why do you forget to eat?"

Mama turns her face toward outside the window. The sun has already risen above the tops of the forest. Golden-red rays of light are intensely cast on the grasslands, on the river's banks, on the advancing train, and on mama's face.

Mama feels the scorching heat of the light.

"Me, it's time to see you." Mama contemplates in her heart.

Hope starts to dazzle in front of mama's eyes. Like the early morning sunshine, it makes mama's eyes view things in a blur. Ah, it is not easy to catch distant and indistinct hope. Where are you?

## **Eight**

On the third day at noon, the train stops for a minute at a little northern station. The desolation of this little station is more than just that of the season. Piles of rotting poplar leaves are heaped up on the station's platform. In front of the waiting room that has been eroded by the wind and rain is exposed the name of the old station: Fort Hope.<sup>11</sup> A few, scattered railway staff members stand on the platform

to welcome the travelers from far away. The people that get off the train are less than ten. Mama and child mix in this crowd.

Regardless of the desolate impression that the small station bequeaths to people or how it spreads a dose of icy-coldness on the hearts of the travelers from far away, mama looks at the whole little station and a triumphant smile flows quietly across her face because in the end mama survived bravely in this long itinerary, long hunger, and long suffering. Mama overcame everything. If life can really be said to be a constant fight, mama deserves to be called a fighter loyal unto herself!

Mama leads the child out of the train station and amiably asks an elderly person walking beside her: "It isn't far to Fort Hope town, is it?"

The elderly person measures up mama's appearance.

"Not far! That row of houses in front is the street of the small town. Where are you going?"

Mama thinks about it: How should these words be said? To tell the truth is quite embarrassing, but she really wants to hear news of her man. Perhaps this elderly person will know.

"Oh, we are looking for someone."

"Looking for who?"

"Looking for Jiang Deming."

"Jiang Deming, what is your relationship?"

"Jiang Deming is our child's baba."

Mama really is a little embarrassed.

"Jiang Deming, this person seems very familiar, but I can't remember..."

"Do you know him? Do you know where he is?"

"That..."

The elderly person tilts his head, thinks about it, and finally shakes his head, meaning to say that he cannot remember anymore.

With such questions and answers, mama and the elderly person have already walked onto the middle street of the small town. The households of this small town may not be considered few, but it is not very lively. It is like a dead star fallen quietly on the wasteland in the remnants of the Xing'anling mountains.<sup>12</sup> Under the eaves of several shops, lonely color-faded cloths sway, and scattered peasants wearing belts walk on the street.

Walking in the middle of the street, the elderly person suddenly stops his steps. "Go into this small shop and inquire. People from the past, they know almost all of the people from the past."

Mama thanks the elderly person and leads the child into the little shop hanging a flower signboard. This little shop has no gold plaque. Beside the door is a wooden board with a name written on it that has been blackened by the winter coal's smoke – nothing can be made out.

Uneasily, mama hangs back from this little shop's door. She plans to push in and ask many times, but she still feels that this is a little inconvenient. Furthermore, how can these words be said again? So, the more bothered mama is, the more her feet continue to loiter outside the door of this little shop. Before long, the exterior door is pushed open, and a middle-aged man walks out, measuring mama up, and with a cold face starts to ask mama: "Ah, who are you looking for here?"



Mama's face is full of an apologetic smile. "I've come from a home Inside the Pass. Come to look for the baba of our child. His name is Jiang Deming."

"Jiang Deming? There's no such person."

"No? He is a businessman..."

The middle-aged man ponders a while. "Go on and ask at the cashier's office! I just can't remember, maybe I arrived too late, I don't know."

This time, mama feels the greatest courage. She opens the door, passes the low threshold, and inside is the hall of a three-room building. There are not many people in the room. Mama leads the child to the place where the money table is placed on a *kang*,<sup>13</sup> and asks a man about forty years old who sits smoking a long-stemmed tobacco pipe: "Do you know Jiang Deming?"

"Eh? Jiang Deming?"

The man's yellow eyes roll around, then he firmly draws a puff of smoke. "Who are you to him?"

"I am – he is our child's baba. Do you know where he is now?"

"This, this has to wait for me to think."

Mama looks at those muddy eyes and feels an inexplicable abhorrence, just as she felt about that man at the pier.<sup>14</sup> But, to ask about her husband's whereabouts, she has to yield a little.

"Please think about it, where is he? I've come from far away, leading the child to arrive here, it's really not an easy matter! If he can't be found, I won't be able to go back..."

The man appears to be very sympathetic to mama's words. "Oh, of course, I'll have a good think... Jiang Deming, I've heard this person's name!"

He takes a puff, the smoke goes out, and he lights another match.

"Yes! He's a businessman! After that, what happened to him? Something happened to him. I don't know why there's been no news of him since then."

"You say he came to do business in this town? Isn't that so. At that time, business was still pretty good!"

Although there was a little news known, ah, this news brought mama such an inauspicious omen. What people say probably cannot be wrong! So, Mama stands foolishly there, thinking of a dark black prison cell, an ice-cold life, painful days...

"Have a seat! Warm up with the child on the *kang*!"

Mama really has no other place to go. Fort Hope has been found. News of the man has been heard. All these arrangements seem to be a destiny that cannot be defied. If it really is destiny, what else is there to say?

Mama looks at the child. She wants to cry but she cannot.

"Let's do it! You, manager, are kind-hearted, so I plan to stay here a few days to make inquiries. However, I have no money for room or food. I can cook for the shop, but I beg you to take us two people in, me and my son. We'd be endlessly grateful."

That man's yellow eyes roll around again, then he nods his head.

"Okay, are there any people who cannot be saved? You can live here now! My family name is Huang. If something comes up, just look for me, Treasurer Huang!"

Mama thanks him again and again, and just stays here.

## Nine

Since that day of arriving here, mama fulfills the initial promise – in the day she makes three meals for the shop, to make up for the room and food money for herself and the child. The child seems to have accepted this inevitable destiny and has never, like at home, thrown mama's work into disorder.

How about at night? Mama is the only woman in the shop! Living on the small *kang* on the edge of Treasurer Huang's inner room, although far away from the general travellers outside, mama's wariness is not actually relieved by this. Almost every night, mama sits catnapping. No matter if she lies down to sleep with her clothes on, the sleeping time is very short. Not waiting for everyone to get up, mama already goes alone to the outer room to light the fire.

However, one day, the time of lighting the fire had already passed, and mama's shadow cannot be seen to come out to cook. Later, Treasurer Huang comes out and says that mama is ill. Let the old night watchman cook a few meals instead!

Rumours scatter to fill the little shop and the little town. It is said that mama already married Treasurer Huang to become his concubine and, further, a happy wedding event will be held!

And it is said, Treasurer Huang raped mama...

It is also said, Treasurer Huang proposed to mama. Not only did mama not agree, but she shouted abuse at him. Because of this, Treasurer Huang also grew incensed, she had to agree or else...

Some even said...

One day, two days, when the rumors still made great efforts to multiply, a new matter occurred in this small shop.

First, Treasurer Huang is said to have been injured, and he asked a doctor of Western medicine from a distant place to come and treat him. Never had this small place been patronized by a Western doctor so, when the doctor of Western medicine entered this small street, everyone knows that some matter had occurred.

Second, that day's afternoon! Mama and child were taken into custody by the local police. Moreover, after just asking a few words, they were sent to a train for transport to the county seat.

Everyone still cannot figure out what kind of mess it is.

However, mama must have a major relation to Treasurer Huang's injury, otherwise why would she be taken away?

## Ten

Mama, in a daze, is delivered to the county seat with the child.

On that day, in a relatively large yamen, she spent time in a courtroom. The higher authorities also say that mama is guilty of injury because she injured Treasurer Huang. Mama is asked if there was this kind of matter or not. Mama cannot say anything, she just chokes up, then cries uncontrollably.

Subsequently, mama is locked behind iron bars.

After mama stops crying, one hand climbs the rough black iron window bars: "Ah, you can't, you can't..."

"We are innocent, we are innocent..."

"Ah, my child!"

But, in the night, mama's voice went hoarse in the end. Mama intently watches every dusk, every dawn, she remembers the Bo Sea shame, the mainland's famine, brutality and depravity, as if all were just yesterday's matters. The past is finally past, what is the worth of regrets in vain?

Then, mama even more ardently looks forward to the coming days.

February 1944 (Xinjing)

[Cherry]

## Eleven

Mama sits inside the iron window bars for ten full days. For these ten days, worry and anxiety make mama unable to eat. Mama's face is obviously much gaunter. Moreover, somewhat frighteningly, mama's eyes are sunk into her face. On the tenth day, this day, mama very clearly remembers, in the morning of this day, mama is brought up again.

"Are you willing to do manual labor?" The official asks mama.

"Ah, I am very happy to do manual work!" Mama frankly answers like this.

"Will you miss home?"

"Here, I do not have a home. I only have one child; you must return my child to me. It will be alright for me to go anywhere with him."

"Of course, the child is still to be handed over to you." He pauses for a while and says as if perplexed and indecisive: "You say that you are willing to do manual work. Wait until you get a little tired, will you not regret it?" The official follows up like this again.

"I will not regret it." Mama says, calmly and resolutely.

As a result, the official is clearly apprised once more. Only then does mama know that from today onwards she will be sent with many other people to another piece of land to open virgin land.<sup>15</sup> In her heart, mama thinks: Ah, all I want now is to live!

Before long, mama sees the child again. The child is like a lost lamb that finds his mother again. With the joy of this return, he runs into mama's arms. Mama kisses the child's forehead and cannot stop her tears of delight. Mama and child seem to have gone through a nightmare. Now the nightmare has gone. Sunny days open up again.

Passing careful examination, reorganization, outfitting, and so many miscellaneous and reduplicating formalities, just in the afternoon of this day an untidy row of the team sets off from here.

The train drives these people to a green grassland. From here, mama sees the sky again, sees the sun, and sees the long-lost land.<sup>16</sup> As mama is allured by the warm wind, the temperature of the mountain streams, and the vigorous spring scene, it seems as if nature beckons mama. Mama resolutely thinks: If you want to live on the land, ah, you have to work on the land!

## Twelve

The group of people was led to a new piece of land on the plain by a city in Xing'anling's vast forest. Here is overgrown with sleepless grasses and luxuriant vegetation. From far away, it is like a blue sea limitlessly stretching to the far, far horizon. Since mama arrived here with the others who came together, every day they are like swimming in a blue sea to start this bitter and heavy work of pioneering.

Row after row, felled.

Pile after pile, burning.

Sometimes they cut down thousands of years old trees big enough to wrap arms around. Sometimes wildfires burn the hills near and far... In this period, although wild beasts such as long and multicolor poisonous snakes and wolf jackals appear, they are all eradicated by the people.

What is left is a black layer of soil.

The scent of dirt wafts above the black layer of soil. Everyone wields a plough, turning up the hard layer of soil. The vast wilderness is woven into a whole ridge. One after another, from here to there, yesterday's wasteland all changes into cultivable fertile farmland.

Sowing seeds, scattering manure, facing the constant seasonal winds, young shoots mature.

After a rainy season, after the tiring weeding work is done over again and again, the grain seedlings are thicker and stronger, and grow firmer and sturdier. Instead of grass blades and luxuriant vegetation is a sea of millet stalks. When the wind passes, they ripple and ripple to far, far away.

From start to finish, mama does not feel tired. The belief in work that is delivered to mama makes her so much fitter. Actually, the more dull-witted and ignorant people are in their beliefs, the more they have an incomparable, inflexible will. It can be said that putting timidity into practice is the immorality of the intellectual class!

Compared with before, mama is two completely different persons. Mama seems to have forgotten her home, forgotten her own husband, forgotten everything. Mama just worries about her own child, how to make him grow up, make him a more useful person, to be a farmer is good, to be a businessman is also good, to do anything is good.

Without hesitation, mama puts sweat on the farm. Facing the scorching summer sun, mama works as usual without rest. Except for sleep time, mama always throws herself on the new soil. If mama has a home, then the new land should be mama's home forever. If mama has love, then the new land should contain all of mama's love!

Ah, mama is already unable to separate from this new land!

## Thirteen

Autumn brings the season of maturity.

The golden ears of millet are heavy on the ground, the clusters of sorghum are sun-dried red, and fat soy pods split open to reveal the cracks of the bean grains...

Mama looks at the mature autumn harvests. The joy of this portended bumper harvest engraves mama's face with that smile of victory that everyone gets at the time of an achievement.

Ah, mama loves bringing in her own harvest!

One day during the autumn harvest, a line of miners passes by here on route to the mining district. The long journey makes them, such strong men, feel that it is unbearable to endure, with the result that they stay here. After preparing and then a break for the night, they will again head to the road to the mining district.

In the evening, when mama eats dinner, unpredictably, miraculously, from within that group of miners, mama finds a face that she knows so well. She finds a person, a person who mama has been yearning so long for, searched for, and from start to finish had not been seen – her own husband.

After the meal, mama is in a hesitant and hopeful mood as she paces back and forth in front of the low wall by her earthen home. Quietly, a person's voice rings beside mama.

"It's you. How did you get here?"

Mama turns around excitedly and sees a blackened face full of facial hair. Mama is so pained that she cannot open her mouth.

"..."

Staring at each other like this, they use their eyes to tell of lonely times and their distant parting. The mood is sweet, painful too. For a long, long time, mama thinks: To embrace once is good! But mama is not willing to use a woman's love to caress a man's heart and make him suffer. And besides, why should this momentary meeting provoke too many memories again and arouse endless tears? Like this, mama uses the greatest strength to try to overcome the pain, to rescue herself from the pain. Gradually, mama makes her heart turn from agitation to peace.

"You, you know that I looked everywhere for you?"

Mama uses words to gloss over still stirring emotions.

"I didn't know at all!" That person answers blankly.

"But I received so much suffering for you, I received so much torture! I just wanted to find you..."

"Now, aren't we already meeting?"

"No, this meeting and not meeting are the same. You and I are already not only the two people that you and I..."

At the door of the earthen house a person scanning here from afar can very clearly be seen.

"It's me who is sorry to you, I ruined me and got you into trouble." One tear falls from the corner of the man's eyes.

"It doesn't need to be said anymore who got who into trouble. Today, I meet you, this is after all a happy matter. We'll be separated tomorrow, and we can't say for sure what month, what year we can be together again..."

"I'm really ashamed. I did one thing wrong, and it made me receive a punishment from the law. This matter sends us to the mining district to shovel. I only have this opportunity to meet you, but I don't have the right to be with you for long."

"Your words, I understand them all. I'm the same as you too."

"You're the same as me too?"

"Yes."

Subsequently, mama strolls toward the field. Alongside the ridge of the bean field, that person follows behind mama. They walk to the end of the bean field and mama sits down there, that person also follows to sit there.

"What about our child?"

"He, he's sleeping. You'd better not see him!"

"Okay, we shouldn't let him know that he has this kind of baba."

"..."

Dusk, a cool breeze blows the mature peas, making a sound like a layer of sand. Accompanied by mama's chaotic state of mind, ah, this really is an unforgettable dusk!

"What're you going to do?" One hand holds mama's hand. Mama does not evade and lets him hold it.

"I'll work here and take care of our child."

"You suffer too much."

"Not really."

Mama shakes her head. Mama dares not say words to hurt the man's feelings. Of course, mama is willing to continue to be along his side, that is every woman's cherished desire. However, different circumstances must separate the two people into two places.

In a short time, dusk passes, night comes.

Mama's hand is even more tightly held.

"Do you hate me?"

"No, I don't hate you at all."

...

Far, faraway, from the direction of the earthen house comes the loud call of the evening roll call. So, mama and that person stand up in panic and run toward the way they came. Not far from the bean field, beyond the short wall, mama and that person look at each other for a moment, sad and in despair, they separate their hands.

From this, mama does not see that person again.

This night, counting the mysterious autumn stars, mama has insomnia. Sad memories flood mama's chest. Tears flow from mama's eyes. For a long time, it has been hard for mama to forget that person! For him, mama is willing to endure pain, willing to endure everything. What about now? What is mama's life for now? The more mama interrogates herself, mama's tears are more and more. Mama thinks about herself, thinks about the child, thinks about everything. No matter what, she cannot go to sleep. Mama just opens her eyes, anxiously and ardently looking forward to the dawn of tomorrow...

## **Fourteen**

The next morning, just as the sky brightens, a team of miners quietly wait to set off.

Mama gets up extremely early, leading the child to brave the thick and icy dew of the autumn morning. They run to a hill and stand. The wind at dawn blows to make both mama and child shiver with cold.

"Is it cold?" Mama asks.

"Not cold." The child's mouth says, "not cold," but his jaws knock out a rhythmic sound.

Before long, a group of people walk out of a low earthen house, slowly dragging pitiful steps, starting step by step to go faraway, to the other side of the mountain.

Mama opens her eyes wide, looking at the road going to the other side of the mountain.

"What are you looking at mama?" The child finally asks with misgivings.

"I'm not looking at anything, child."

Mama strokes the top of the child's head. A kind of crying mood makes mama unable to say anything else.

Standing in the gently floating thick mist, mama is still not willing to leave here. Although the shadows of a group of people can already no longer be seen, mama's eyes are forever open in that direction.

When the mist disperses, the sun rises from the clouds.

Mama seems to have acquired a great consciousness, a great sobriety.

Without him, I deserve to live healthy and strong!

In front of mama's eyes gradually brightens. Mama initially feels as if her life is her own. After all, it is not attributable to or affiliated with anyone. Although joining forces with a man would be happier, losing such a joining of forces with a man cannot dishearten her own activities.

Mama looks at the mature farmland under the hills. The standing grain is like a vast sea, praising the fullness of their lives, twinkling and undulating in the sunlight.

Mama mumbles to herself: "This autumn harvest, ah, the fruit of labor!"

In front of mama's eyes thoroughly brightens.

March 1944 (Xinjing)

## Notes

- 1 In Zhu Ti's 1945 collected works, this story is divided into three sections: "Yan" (Wild Goose), "Zao" (Algae) and "Ying" (Cherry). These are clearly marked in this translation.
- 2 In the 1945 version, odor is "*qiwei*." In subsequent versions, "*qiwei*" is changed to "*xianwei*" – salty odor.
- 3 Later versions, "*yaya*" is replaced with "*huahua sheng*" (whistling sounds).
- 4 In post-Manchukuo reproductions, "new" has been replaced by "strange."
- 5 *Hai he*, alternately known as the White River (*Bai he*).
- 6 Travel fatigue (*fengchen*) can also mean chaos caused by war.
- 7 "East of the Pass" is a term for Manchuria, or the current Northeast of China.
- 8 "Deliver me to the new land!" is in the original publication but not in later editions.
- 9 Before the establishment of Manchukuo, 15 types of currency circulated in the region. In 1932, the Manchukuo *yan* was established – giving subjects three years to dispose of previous currencies, which were then banned.
- 10 The last two sentences are in the original publication, but not in subsequent versions.
- 11 Fort Hope is *Ba bao*.
- 12 A mountainous region in northeast Inner Mongolia that was part of Manchukuo when this story was written. The name derives from the Manchu word for hills, *hingan*.

- 13 A *kang* is a low, wide stove-couch/bed used for heating, cooking, sitting and sleeping in north China.
- 14 Yellow, muddy eyes are suggestive of an opium smoker.
- 15 Technically not wasteland, but rather land in Beidahuang (the Great Northern Wilderness), where many convicted of crimes were sent for labor reform
- 16 *Jinwei le de dadi* has dual meanings: “long-lost land” or “long-lost whole territory of a nation.”



## 9 Little Yinzi and Her Family (1944)

Just now, the sky darkens.

Next door, Little Yinzi's<sup>1</sup> mother raises her cracking voice to start to sing with a low squeaking five-string *qin*.<sup>2</sup> It is like beating a broken gong, and people who hear it are unable to say what it feels like, only to suspect that it is not the musical sounds of a human being, especially not the musical sounds of a woman.

After singing the lascivious "Peach Blossom Cottage,"<sup>3</sup> the part of this trivial tune that she is said to be good at, then follows a big change of style, as she shouts out "The Wandering Songstress."<sup>4</sup>

Honestly, it makes me unable to read anymore. I push away Gogol's *Mirgorod*,<sup>5</sup> and put it down in front of me. I use my fingers to stop up my ears, but remarkably the sound still penetrates from all directions. I cannot help but start to curse my environment. I very much regret that I did not abide by the ancient admonition to "choose neighbors."<sup>6</sup>

Passing through the screen window  
In blows the May wind  
Ah, from the end of the earth  
To the farthest sea  
I search for my heart's companion  
Little sister sings songs  
A young man performs on a *qin*  
We two are of one heart.<sup>7</sup>

Barking out the trifling words, the hoarse voice is pointedly emotional. Not waiting for the song to finish, the voices of two raucous men start to yell out. Hearing that sound, it seems that one is Little Yinzi's nominal father, Blindman Yu; the other might just be President Long.

Although called Blindman, he really is not blind. Moreover, his eyes are almost twice as protruding as ordinary people's. It is said that the reason for calling him Blindman is because he has always seemed to have poor eyesight. So, on the street when he comes across his virtuous and able wife,<sup>8</sup> Little Yinzi's mother, with others' arms on her shoulders, when others ask him, he says that he does not see, so others presented him with the nickname "Blindman." What about him? He also

acknowledges this nickname himself. He says: "Without the nickname, I would not be able to build up the family fortunes."

The other, President Long, is Blindman's sworn brother. Blindman tells others that he and President Long are relatives and intimately acquainted brothers. What about President Long? One time, when I was at the branch office to receive beer tickets, I heard his coarse voice boasting how his niece Little Yinzi is so coquettish, how she teases him, how they tangle with each other...

Sure enough, just now it is precisely President Long who claps his hands and shouts "Bravo!" When he raises his coarse voice again, it is extremely gentle with a wheedling tone: "Little Yinzi, sing one for uncle to hear."

"..."

"Little Yinzi, sing one..."

"..."

Blindman is probably a little unable to control himself. Little Yinzi is becoming more and more courageous, daring to start to defy his sworn brother.

"I said, Little Yinzi, sing one right now! Fuck it, the bigger you get, the less you know how to favor. Look you thin, weak person, floating messily about..."<sup>9</sup>

In the end, Blindman's words have weight. After a short interlude drags out, Little Yinzi's slightly aggrieved and trembling singing voice drifts over the May night wind. It seems to be the third stanza of "The Wandering Songstress":

In life, who does not  
Cherish the springtime of youth?  
A young girl to her man  
...  
Is like thread to its needle  
Ah, my beautiful man  
We're like a threaded needle  
Never to be separated  
....<sup>10</sup>

From inside Blindman's room comes a booming burst of laughter, which harbors such an unspeakable, unruly rapaciousness that can give people goose flesh.

A door heavily opens and closes. Little Yinzi runs to the center of the courtyard. They babble, although I do not hear very clearly. Indistinctly, Little Yinzi says: "What human nature? Don't look at someone else, look at yourself..."

On the second day after I moved here, I met Little Yinzi.

It was winter and the road was covered with a thin layer of snow. I went to the tofu rations shop. Walking and walking, I heard the sound of a string of creaking footsteps trailing behind me.

I looked back and saw the face of a pretty and charming girl. A cold wind blew to blush her face, which was fresh, red and very beautiful.

"Have you just moved here?"

I nodded my head.

"Then we are neighbors!"

"Where do you live?"

"I just live next to your house!"

"What's your name?"

"Me? I'm called Little Yinzi."

From that day on, I have known Little Yinzi. When I run into her in the courtyard, she always smilingly nods her head to me and we exchange a few words of idle chatter.

Sometime later, mama told me that Little Yinzi is not the biological daughter of her father and mother; she had probably been bought from a poor family somewhere. Life in her family now consists of her singing little songs in the alleys at night.

Every day, when the electric lights come on, Little Yinzi puts on a smart set of clothes and wears a red, carved rose brooch on her right bosom. On her head is a very large coil of hair, and she follows the *qin* master to go to near "New Heaven and Earth" to sell songs.<sup>11</sup>

I see Little Yinzi waiting in the middle of the courtyard for the *qin* master. I stand in my doorway and ask her: "Little Yinzi, where are you going?"

"I'm going to the little alley."

"What do you sing?"

"I sing whatever, I have to follow the lords' instructions. If people want us to sing east, we have to sing east, if people want us to sing west, we have to sing west. One time, they insistently demanded that I sing some big noisy 'Pan Jinlian whatever.'<sup>12</sup> I said I didn't know it and suffered an abusive scolding."

"You don't make much money in one night, right?"

"Whatever money is made, I'm not given any to spend..."

Little Yinzi whispers as if she does not dare to let anyone hear her. She is still wanting to speak when the *qin* master with rickets walks in. Little Yinzi greets him hurriedly and walks out.

At midnight, I hear someone lightly knocking at Blindman's door. I think it might be Little Yinzi returning.

It is so deep in the night, and it is winter too. Little Yinzi must be so cold! Lying wrapped in the quilt, the more I think, the more I cannot sleep. At this time, Hua is beside me and he is not asleep either. He hears me tossing and turning left and right, then asks me why I am not yet asleep. I tell him what I am thinking.

It is as if Hua does not care. He smiles: "You should go to sleep! You worry about others' affairs – that's called 'Seeing the Three Kingdoms and Crying'..."<sup>13</sup>

"Come on, stop talking!"

Although I do not want Hua to carry on talking, I continue to brood. Yet Little Yinzi has the fate of Little Yinzi. If I worry about her, what good will that do? Such a person is a bit foolish.

It is spring. More time is spent outdoors and there are increased opportunities for me and Little Yinzi to meet.

During the day, when I cook or when I knit a sweater outside the door, Little Yinzi runs out of the house, finds a place to sit down next to me and chats to me, while I work.

One day, she ran over and sat next to me on the ground.

“Don’t sit on the ground – the ground is so cool!”

“It’s not cold. Don’t you know – I’m not afraid of anything.”

Following that, she tells me about her own affairs as if she cannot wait to fully reveal herself to me. She tells me how she sings casually in the alleys, how guests make excuses to not give money. If she is rewarded with money, the prostitutes are so jealous, but never does a share of the money reach her hands... Then she talks about her family.

“You know! My father, that person – he looks honest but actually his heart is very evil! The first few days, he took advantage of my mother shopping for shoes. He said so many scandalous things to me. I don’t need to say, you understand! However, from start to finish, I didn’t answer back. Tell me, what do you call such a person! My mother is going to Chaoyang town again.<sup>14</sup> He said wait until my mother goes to Chaoyang and he will settle accounts with me. I, if I have no other way then, I’d rather commit suicide...”

What did I say? I could not say a thing.

“Also, my mother exhorts me to do evil things! I know, sooner or later they will hurt me. My mother, you see, she seems most honorable but, when she goes outside the city, she can earn so much money to return with. Isn’t she fooling around with other men? One day, when she was drunk, she started to brag about drinking with the county magistrate’s seventh son, and how considerate the young master can be... She even caused father to give her a slap across the face, and the two quarrelled for two days!”

I listen to Little Yinzi’s words, thinking of these few people revolving around her. What kind of devils in animal forms they are!

Little Yinzi looks at me with her big eyes. I do not speak, she promptly carries on the topic of conversation.

“You saw! That President Long, my distant Uncle Long, it’s no wonder they are sworn brothers, his temper’s as bad as my father’s. When I’m alone in the house, he’s always grinning cheekily and taking liberties, he is always thinking to either take me out to eat, or take me to the movies, talking about how good the film is, how popular dancing is in Shanghai, and what kinds of nightclubs. He talks vividly and dramatically about taking sexual partners to hotels. When I pay no attention him, it’s his turn to come to lure me with promises of gain! He promised that when the cloth tickets are allocated next time, he’ll think of a way to give me a piece of blue woolen cloth and, no less, two pairs of silk stockings can also be done... You say, why would a 50- or 60-year-old man want to incur the favor of a young girl like this? Humph, he thinks I don’t know! Men offer all kinds of promises to women, and it’s not for nothing.”

Listening to Little Yinzi’s heap of discussions, I could not help smiling. Little Yinzi does not seem to notice my reason for smiling. She looks at me blankly, wanting to say more but could not speak, wanting to ask me why I am smiling. She is embarrassed.

At this time, I have to open my mouth.

“You are young, don’t indulge in such flights of fancy!”

Little Yinzi hears me say that she is young and thinks it a bit unfair.

"I'm young? Even though I'm young, I understand everything too. The prostitutes in the alley talk with me. They say that me being this age is really the same as an adult. They also joke with me..."

This is the first time I ever met such an unrestrained self-confession. My face feels scorching hot. I greatly fear that her mouth will pull out some even more scandalous words. I wave to bring a stop to her topic of conversation.

"You understand, so count it as understanding, I don't want you to talk anymore!"

Little Yinzi thinks that something she said must have offended me. Quietly, she stands up and slinks away.

Many days passed after that.

Little Yinzi did not look for me to chitchat again. When we come across each other in the courtyard, although she greets me as usual, she always lowers her head and walks away with an appearance that she has many worries disturbing her restless mood.

As soon as I got busy, I dismissed the matter of Little Yinzi from consideration.

However, it is a fact that every day in step with time Little Yinzi goes to the alleys, and it is also a fact that every day she returns home before the middle of the night. Because the time she goes out is precisely the time I work, and the house where I work is separated from her house by only a wooden partition, if I pay just a slight attention, I can hear it.

It was the seventeenth of April in the lunar calendar! The first day of just finishing Hua's birthday. The next day, mama and I sat in front of the window gossiping, and mama wittingly or unwittingly says: "Perhaps their Little Yinzi's mother has skills. The festival is coming, and they are going to Chaoyang town again. The least she can make is 1000 or 800 *yuan* to come back, and she is a woman too..."

I suddenly remember what Little Yinzi told me in the spring. This time when her mother really leaves again, how can Little Yinzi endure it? Supposing Little Yinzi's words are true, then Little Yinzi's fate really dare not be imagined.

I remember that in a foreign film the female protagonist at her production banquet once stated her feelings: "Male brutality is limitless."

Now, these words touch me greatly. Especially thinking of the highest-ranking person in the young girl's family – if he imposes an unbearable ravaging on her too, with what kind of sheer luck can she escape such a disaster?

In the night, I listen attentively to the sounds of movement next door.

One night, and another night.

This night, I find that Little Yinzi did not go from place to place in the little alleys. The *qin* master came and walked out alone. Because of the sounds of footsteps walking back and forth in small steps, I know that there is a person next door who is constantly pacing. Other than that, there is no other sound. It is much quieter than usual, not a sound at all.

I think, perhaps my over worrying is simply not right.

Eleven o'clock passes. I take off the clothes that I wore outside and prepare to sleep well. At this time, Hua's snoring arouses my drowsiness, I am already deeply drowsy.

Just as I was about to step out of the small room adjoining the wall, there is the shouting of an extremely terrified woman from the other side of the wall. My drowsiness is driven completely away. Just wearing a shirt, I nestle against the wall and listen. After this not so long shout, I hear the sounds of two people who seem to be wrestling extremely seriously, falling down and getting up. In the middle is occasionally mixed a lot of a woman's verbal abuse. From this verbally abusive voice, I hear it is precisely Little Yinzi.

Then, Little Yinzi is in the process of resisting her inevitable fate!

I cannot help but shiver. Although the scene has not yet stopped, before my eyes Little Yinzi's hopes wither away, bit by bit. I start to think about rescue, I run into the bedroom, I push awake the very deeply sleeping Hua. I say: "You – quickly think of a way! Next door, Little Yinzi and Blindman are starting to go at it! Blindman, this big scoundrel – you say, what can be done to save Little Yinzi?"

Hua, half asleep, looks at me.

"You are poking your nose into others' business again. How can we interfere with other peoples' family matters?"

I am anxious and shake Hua's head: "You can't say that! What kind of family matter is this? Can't you have the police seize Blindman and take him away? Otherwise, Little Yinzi will certainly be violated."

Hua opens his mouth, yawns, and blames me: "You are getting more and more out of control. It's fighting, it's teaching, you're unable to figure it out, you just want me to go find the police – this really is a joke. I think you'd better be careful not to ask for trouble and meet with a rebuff!"

After speaking, he covers his head and goes to sleep. I am angry again, exasperated again. I run back to the small room, lean against the wall again and listen. At first, I cannot hear anything. Then, I hear the slightest groaning, gasping for breath and...

I suffer the greatest despair. I run back to bed and lie down. Feelings of anger lash my heart from left to right, making me not sleep well through the night.

After that night, rumors about Little Yinzi were often heard in the courtyard.

Little Yinzi did not often come to the courtyard.

When I cook in front of the door, through the glass window I sometimes see Little Yinzi in her room staring blankly. When she sees me looking at her, she hurriedly hides, and even pulls down the window's curtains.

The more she hides from me, the more I want to see her.

One time, in the evening, when she had still not gone from place to place in the alleys and was in the process of taking advantage of the cold, from behind her, I walked around to beside her.

"Little Yinzi!"

Stunned, she turns around to see it is me: "..."

She does not make a sound, she nods and wants to leave. I stretch out my hand to grab her arm and in a low voice: "How are you after all?"

She looks at me, her eyes fill with tears.

"I, I accepted my fate!"

While talking, she uses her hands to cover her face and runs back into the room. All the signs confirmed my random thoughts.

This matter of Little Yinzi keeps going round in my heart. Perhaps it is because she said to me so many sincere words, not a bit glossed over. Those words, only now do I find them sorrowful. I also find that Little Yinzi's fate was very clear to her, she had no alternative but to accept it.

I hope that Little Yinzi will have a lucky turn for the better.

Hope, hope. In the end, good luck cannot be ardently expected! In lieu of luck, in less than half a month came the midday when Little Yinzi's mother returned from outside the city.

Me and mama were sitting in the courtyard taking advantage of the cold and at the same time washing vegetables and cooking. Little Yinzi's mother was like an arrow. Taking three steps in two, she burst straight into her room and then a disturbance started in her room. It seems that she grabbed Little Yinzi. Intermingling with Little Yinzi's imploring, crying, and shouting, Little Yinzi's mother whipped Little Yinzi with something while shouting abuse: "You little slut! I couldn't anticipate that you'd dare seduce your father and bully me! I can't be bullied by you! I've travelled north and south and I've never been bullied by anyone! The person to bully me has yet to dig out of his mother's womb!"

As there is a window in the wall, in the courtyard, we hear it all clearly.

"Speak up! What sort of goings on is this? If you're in the right, I'll come and serve you. But here I am and what face have I got to go on? My girl tries to seize my territory now."

"...."

"You don't want to speak, fine – I'll beat you to death right now."

"..."

"Speak up, if you are really unbridled, any young guys on the street can do it. How can you shack up with a fifty or sixty-year-old? I ask you! Are you going to tell me or what?"

"..."

Little Yinzi just whimpers. Once in a while, when her mother hits her, she screams but she cries non-stop. She does not offer a single word in response.

Before long, Blindman returns.

He strides into the house, one foot after another, as if he knows that the little child's mother has returned. Grinning from ear to ear, President Long follows behind.

When President Long enters the room, he raises his husky voice: "I say, elder brother's wife, you mustn't get so heated up over this business! Listen to me! Don't get angry over Little Yinzi, it's not worth it."

"I'm not getting angry, but uncle Long you say, where in the world could that happen, a daughter taking up with her father!"

"Ah, but this can't be blamed on my elder brother. In the first place, sex is normal, it's impossible to avoid it. But, to talk about it, Little Yinzi is in the wrong! No matter what, this kind of violation of human relationships can't be eliminated! This, this has to do with bloodlines and descendants!"

"That's what I said. You little bitch, watch me peel your skin..." Little Yinzi's mother grabs something to hit Little Yinzi with.

"Don't get angry! Put it down! Sister-in-law, listen to what I have to say. When women grow up, they can't stay in their home or return! Think of a way to get her out and save all your heartache."

"But ..."

"Eh, are you afraid no-one will go to the little alley to make money for you? Hmm, I've got a little idea..."

"Then spit it out!"

President Long and Little Yinzi's mother talk in whispers and as carefully as I can listen, I just cannot make it out clearly. But I remember how Little Yinzi told me of President Long sacrificing his Little Yinqin. They must be making the most diabolical plans for Little Yinzi.

After they whisper, Little Yinzi's mother and President Long laugh delightedly. Their laughter is spliced with unimaginable treachery and cunning. Little Yinzi's mother stops laughing and coldly says to her: "This time you're really lucky! You should thank your uncle, because from tonight on, you'll go and serve your uncle."

"What?"

A voice cries in fear and with a thud a person faints to the floor.

President Long laughs as before and exuberantly orders Blindman to go and call for a car. He helps Little Yinzi's mother try to revive her: "Little Yinzi! Little Yinzi!"

After Little Yinzi is carried away in a faint, she never returns.

In the courtyard, all are busily preparing for the spring festival. Nobody is bothered with the outcome of this incident. When people do talk of Little Yinzi, and that is only occasionally, rumors are not very believable. Sometimes they are so exaggerated that people do not dare believe them. For example, Little Yinzi became President Long's mistress and is a real somebody! President Long put her in a Western-style house, with a bathroom, guest room, and a car. When she goes to see a movie, she sits in a box. She eats watermelon before May...

But, according to how Little Yinzi's mother talks, I have gradually come to understand what happened. First, President Long wrote Little Yinzi's mother about Blindman and Little Yinzi, so she immediately returned. The outcome of the quiet talk with President Long is that he introduced a young girl to take the place of Little Yinzi to go to the alley and sing songs. President Long secretly gave Little Yinzi's mother three cloth rations. Little Yinzi's mother brought out the cloth for all the neighbors to see. One was four yards of soft silk satin, one was four yards of blue coarse cotton cloth, and one was two yards of fine yarn with a peony flower pattern.

These – these are Little Yinzi's total worth! Little Yinzi's mother said it correctly: These few things are worth more than Little Yinzi. Needless to say otherwise! Four yards of silk satin is valued at 500–600 *yuan*. Little Yinzi, a stinky girl, how much money can she be worth?

On the night before the May festival, Blindman returned from President Long's and said something to Little Yinzi's mother, and Little Yinzi's mother raised a real ruckus.

"Someone's dead? Good for him, you tell him. Before it's too late, get the girl he mentioned to me. No, ah, I've got a way for him to understand me! I'll tell him just as it is, I'll tell him to take the cloth. This is a decent place..."



As Blindman's voice calms down, I guess he covered Little Yinzi's mother's mouth. Little Yinzi's mother finished dinner early, put on a black hat and went out, without any bother.

On that May festival day, at breakfast, I was outside cutting *zongzi*.<sup>15</sup> A little girl about four or five years younger than Little Yinzi came and sat beside me. Her mouth waters as she watches me cut the *zongzi*.

"*Zongzi*, do they taste good?"

"Mm."

I give her one. She takes it and, in one bite, two bites, it is gone.

"I'm hungry. Mother and father still haven't given me anything to eat!"

"Whose family are you in?" I give her another one.

"I live here!"

She points at Little Yinzi's mother's house. I cannot bear to look at this little girl. Her eyes, like Little Yinzi's, are lovely, with a pure and honest light. Her face is very beautiful.

"What's your name?" I continue cutting the *zongzi*.

"I'm called Little Lotus."

I look again at her eyes, her face.

I cannot speak. I do not know why but I feel like I have to cry. To get away from Little Lotus, the young girl in front of me, I run into the house.

Mama sees me run in empty-handed, and asks me curiously: "Are the *zongzi* finished?"

"I'm not finished peeling them yet!"

Answering, tears could not help falling from my eyes, rolling down my face.

1944, Dragon Boat Festival, Xinjing

## Notes

- 1 Yinzi means money or silver, thus her name in English is Little Money/Silver, underlining her monetary value.
- 2 A *qin* is a seven-stringed Chinese musical instrument.
- 3 A song from a poem comparing the rich and poor, with a particular focus on the latter's excessive use of alcohol. It was written by Tang Yin (1470–1524), a notable Chinese painter, one of "The Four Masters of the Ming Dynasty."
- 4 "*Tian ya ge nü*" is a classic Chinese love song, sung by singer and actress Zhou Xuan (1920–1957), "The Golden Voice," and was featured in the 1937 film, *Malu tianshi* (*Street Angel*). The lyrics were written by noted composer Tian Han (1898–1968), who also wrote the national anthem of the PRC. It was also sung by Manchurian actress Li Xianglan (1920–2014) in the 1944 Japanese film *Yasen gungakutai* (*Military Combat Music Band*).
- 5 *Mirgorod* is a short story collection, published in 1835, by the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852).
- 6 "Choose neighbors" is *ze lin*.
- 7 Parts of these lyrics can be found at <http://xahmusic.org/music/tian1ya2ge1.html> (accessed 23 January 2019).
- 8 "Wife" is written here as *nei zhu* – literally, inside help.
- 9 Thin, weak person is *douya cai* – literally, "bean sprouts."
- 10 Song lyrics accessed 23 January 2019 at <http://xahmusic.org/music/tian1ya2ge1.html>

- 11 New Heaven and Earth is Xintiandi.
- 12 Pan Jinlian is a fictional, adulterous female character in the classic Chinese novels, *The Plum in the Golden Vase* and *The Water Margin*. Pan is also the patron saint of brothels and sex workers.
- 13 看三国掉眼泪. The Three Kingdoms (220–280) was a historical period when China was divided into three states. It is considered one of the bloodiest periods in China's history. An English equivalent could be “crying over spilt milk.”
- 14 Chaoyang is a city in western Liaoning province.
- 15 This is a reference to the Dragon Boat festival. *Zongzi* are sticky rice dumplings wrapped in leaves and are a major part of celebrations – they are regarded as a lucky symbol.

## 10 Little Scene of the Neighbors (1944)

(Under the Exhibition of “Progressive Women Writers of Manchuria”)

In this important era, the progressive writer Zhu Ti has written a novella about neighborhood associations.<sup>1</sup>

At dusk, light rain falls from the sky.

In the drizzling rain, a shadowy group of people stand under the eaves of the neighborhood work leader Zhang's house and peer out of a glass window. Almost all the neighbors have gathered on the street corner. There is Zhang Lady Three, Big Old Li the stutterer's daughter-in-law, Ma Four sister-in-law, Ying's wife number Two, Big Wang's widow, also Little Yinzi...

Hua is reading the newspaper. I run out the door, “I say, what are you doing standing in the rain?”

Hearing my question, Little Yinzi scurries over.

“Sister-in-law, I tell you, now at work leader Zhang's place, he and the neighborhood association head are distributing this occasion's cloth ration tickets! I know that there is eighteen feet of filling cloth. There is over a yard of synthetic silk, over two yards of white cotton, and... at least there's one pair of socks and two spools of thread too.”

Not waiting for me to speak, Little Yinzi blabbers on with white froth forming on his mouth. The crowd of people standing whispering sees that I am not captivated by his words, as he very sharp-wittedly says to me, “These things, how can they be divided? I don't know about other people, but to split it up and give me the crummy stuff, I absolutely don't want it! Sister-in-law, come and listen! Listen to how the work leader and neighborhood association head divide them! Then we'd better do it fast, we should take the first good ones, who cares about the other people! Hmph!...”

Seeing Little Yinzi's appearance, I have to believe it, and then nod my head. The crowd of people, standing under the eaves of the neighborhood work leader Zhang's house, is like a mountain erected in that spot, raising their ears, facing the window.

“But I also need to follow the neighborhood association's distribution!”

“The neighborhood association head – hmph, do you think he'll give you a fair share? You're dreaming!”

"If he's fair or not, that's his concern, isn't it?"

"Really? We deserve these things, and we should stretch out our hands for them! According to what I say, if someone doesn't stretch their hands out, that person is a fool!"

I giggle and do not answer.

Light rain continues to fall from the sky.

Little Yinzi suddenly thinks of something, leans to my ear, and says, "But if you let your husband go talk to the neighborhood association head, that will do, I guarantee. Would he dare reject you? You must do this and don't be polite. If you are polite to him, he can't be polite back!"

I giggle again.

Not waiting for me to answer, I hear the noise of Hua calling me from inside.

I reply and nod my head at Little Yinzi.

"You go back again and listen to their talk! I still have something I need to do."

I go into the house. Hua puts down the newspaper on the table beside him and stands up. Smiling, he says to me, "Were you and Little Yinzi talking about something?"

I use a finger to point outside. Hua follows my finger to look out, and he probably sees Zhang Lady Three and that group of people. Hua does not wait for me to speak. He just nods his head.

"Ah, they've come to pick up something!"

Following Hua, I nod my head.

"Ah, you said it right! Little Yinzi says that right now work leader Zhang has called the head of the neighborhood association to discuss how to divide this occasion's cloth rations. He said that this time there should be six yards of fluffy cloth, more than two yards of white cotton to distribute... as well as two spools of thread. It turns out to be a lot less, so they are all listening about how to divide it. Little Yinzi says for sure that it can't be fair. He even asked me to tell you, for you to go there and we'd get a better cloth ration..."

Hua looks at me and stops me, saying, "What did you and Little Yinzi say?"

I knew Hua was testing me.

"I, I didn't say anything." I smile at him, showing that I do not oppose his words, nor do I truly disagree.

Hua laughs.

Later, Hua and I stand in front of the window, looking outside at the gradually darkening evening. Hua slowly says to me: "In fact, this really is actually nothing. The best thing to do is to divide them according to family needs. If things are needed in a household, distribute them on purpose. The time of caring for material things is already past. Also, the work leader and the head of the neighborhood association are unable to mess this up. Don't you remember? Last year, the business of dividing things, that already taught these people a lesson." Hua speaks of last year's matter. I think that was the time last year that we were just moving here. I heard that the head of distribution was in jail. Later Hua learned at work that the head of distribution had received several more cloth rations than he should have had. This year, he was finally released. The head of distribution's position has

changed, and the former head has scabs all over his body. Now he lives in the west side, across from us.

The night thickens. Hua lights the lamp that shines on the bed. Hua is reading, I sew under the lamp. We occasionally chat, but we do not talk for long, in order not to disturb each other's work.

Before long, someone knocks at the door.

I put down the needle and wool in my hands and go to see who is standing outside the door. Because there is no light outside, I cannot see clearly.

"Who's there?"

"I am Li, head of the neighborhood association! Tonight, there is a neighborhood association meeting about a bag of cloth rations. Please ask your husband to come to my house!"

I wonder whether or not if it is still raining outside.

"Outside is raining. How can we go?!"

The shadow already left the doorway, but his answer was very clear. "The rain has already stopped!"

I go back inside and tell Hua. Hua lifts his head and looks at the calendar. "Today is the neighborhood association meeting day, isn't it?"

Hua grabs his jacket and buttons it up.<sup>2</sup> He says to me, "Ti, aren't you going to go too?"

I hesitate.

"..."

Hua takes a wool vest out of the closet and drapes it on me.

"Go, I say, and you can see clearly what this neighborhood association meeting is like. Also, you are worrying about the cloth rations, right?"

Half angry, half giggling, I glance at Hua.

"Alright, I'll go."

I lock the door and walk to the center of the courtyard. The rain has already stopped. I see above my head that the sky is very dark and humid. Perhaps because it is at night, the sky looks very heavy, as if it needs to rain.

Walking to the window of the head of the neighborhood association Li, from outside I hear a lot of people's boisterous voices. Hua pushes open the door and sees people on the *kang* and on the floor.<sup>3</sup> You could say that I laughed as if someone were having a joyous event.

Seeing Hua and I enter the room, Li the stutterer's daughter-in-law has a full-face smile. She gets up, drags me by the hand, and asks us to sit down beside her. Ying's wife number Two says, "You see, people are people. From dawn to night, they always comb their hair and wash their face. Cooking rice, washing clothes – that is only one person. Then hosting people, dealing with circumstances – everything is perfect! I say, if we have to compare her with us, we are just dreaming!"

Ying's wife number Two puts down her tobacco bag, faces the *kang*, and takes a few puffs. "Eh, I am over the hill!"

When she finishes talking, Ying's wife number Two laughs her head off. Following her laughter, Zhang Lady Three, Ma Four sister-in-law, Big Wang's

Widow, and acting teacher Mr. Liu all laugh. Little Yinzi really laughs, with his head in his hands. He runs to the *kang*, with a strong, convulsing belly laugh.

Facing this scene, Hua and I feel apprehensive.

At this moment, Li, the head of the neighborhood association, pushes open the door and enters. Behind him are four or five people, all of them association members. There is a more than twenty-year-old person, who I recognize is Old Tan from the east corner fried cake shop. The others, I do not remember.

Counting the numbers of those standing on the ground and those on the *kang*, it appears that all the members are here. The association head Li gushes out his Shandong accent, "Then, let's start the meeting!"

First, they testify to their citizens' patriotism. With so many people, naturally that cannot be orderly, but their sincerity is quite appropriate. During that time, not one person laughs – this is rare.

The neighborhood association head is in charge, discussing hygiene issues, questions of security, donations for airplanes, metal recycling... all proceeds very smoothly.

I think, perhaps, this is a special kind of Manchurian character inheritance. They are all very proper. This kind of largesse is so generous. For example, Big Wang's Widow is willing to donate her son's silver bracelet to help raise money for airplanes. Little Yinzi offers that he is willing to contribute his own savings, 13 *yuan*. Really, Little Yinzi, that calculating child, exhibits a strong spirit. This makes me feel the biggest respect for these uneducated people. They are all very kind, more compassionate than us. Reflecting to here, association head Li's Shandong accent wakes me up.

Everybody says, "As long as everyone is happy to share, we'll just share. We shouldn't have something hidden between us. If I have an individualistic nature, I'm just a big bastard..."

Little Yinzi and Zhang Lady Three smile.

I grab the corner of Hua's clothing. Hua seems to get what I mean and stands up.

"To start this matter of dividing cloth rations, I want to express my opinion. Every time there is an allocation of cloth rations, someone takes it and sells it at a high price, or they hide it and don't use it. The rations are only to save those with no clothes and those suffering from the weather, to let them have one set of clothes to wear, to have some thread to sew with. So, understand this – it's easy to divide. If everyone recognizes their own needs, and absolutely doesn't lie, that is one's righteous way. Wait until the war is finished, and we'll then have any kind of cloth. Why should we have to fight over such small things during this hardship?"

It is as if everyone is hypnotized, there is not a noise in the house.

After a few minutes, Li, the head of the association, breaks the deep silence.

"The person who just spoke is really too correct! That's it! You can all say, whatever is useful to who needs it the most. The leftovers, whether they are good or bad, no matter, that is mine. The good thing is that my clothes can be patched and still go on for a year or two. You see this, how it is?"

A few people nod their heads. The others make no noise, they stare and look at each other.

Li takes out a piece of red paper. From a greeting cloth in the bottom of a suitcase, he finds a worn-out pen, and dips it into the ink.

"Zhang Lady Three, say, what would you like?"

Zhang Lady Three bends her head, thinking.

"If possible, give me two yards of synthetic silk! My elderly mother this year is 67 years old. It's best to make her silk pants."

Then, Li's daughter-in-law, Ma Four sister-in-law, Ying's wife number Two, Wang's Widow, Little Yinzi, Little Old Tan are asked... Finally, Hua is asked.

Hua looks at me.

"I hope for two yards of white cotton cloth because this fall my wife will have a baby. White cotton cloth, to give the child some underwear..."

I do not know what to think. I was like a fire burning red hot.

I look at Hua. Hua looks at me.

Association head Li glances at everybody, lowers his head to count the tickets, and writes one time after another, calculating again and again.

"What a coincidence. It is near to what everyone wants. Little Yinzi is happy to take the woolen cloth. Little Old Tan also wants that. There is just one piece of that. There are also two spools of thread. This is not easy to divide... Then, Little Yinzi and Little Old Tan, you two talk! Who needs it the most? There's only one piece, we don't have two."

Little Yinzi blinks his eyes, "I need it!"

Little Old Tan looks at Little Yinzi, and cannot help angrily retorting, "I need it too!"

Association head Li scratches his head anxiously, looks at the tickets and looks at the people.

But Hua thinks of a way. He speaks, "This is what it is. One or two, both need it, but there is only one piece. The result is that one person must be disappointed. Between the two of you, one must back out. But neither one of you two is willing to back out. Now, I think this cloth, it must be given to Little Yinzi, because Little Yinzi is willing to take out his own money, so we must use it to reward him."

Little Yinzi is a little child. Hearing that makes him happy and he jumps down from the *kang*.

Little Old Tan's face turns an angry red. He cannot speak.

Association head Li finally decides to start dividing the cloth rations. Little Yinzi gets the woolen cloth, Zhang Lady Three gets the synthetic silk, and Hua and Li's daughter-in-law get white cotton cloth. Ma Four sister-in-law and Wang's Widow get the wide, white flowered cloth, Ying's wife number Two gets a pair of cotton socks and a bag of pins, and Little Old Tan gets two spools of cotton thread. The association head gets a spool of cotton thread and just over a yard of synthetic green striped silk...

Li asks if everyone has their tickets. If not, they must speak up as later there is no way to fix it.

Nobody makes a sound.

"Okay! Everyone can return home, we're finished."

Nodding his head, Hua and I walk out.

Laughing, Hua says, "You see, isn't this division very well done?"

I am just about to answer, when Little Yinzi runs up from behind me and pushes me.

“See you again tomorrow, sister-in-law!”

With his hand waving the woolen cloth ticket, he runs off home laughing.

I sigh, “A warm breeze, isn’t it a big family?”

The road is too dark. Hua and I walk forward. Walking along, we finally discover that light rain falls from the sky.

July, I returned from Jilin and send this in from  
a box, 6 *yuan* for every 1000 words.

## Notes

- 1 This sentence was added by the editors of the original publication.
- 2 The jacket is likely that of a Concordia Association member, given the level of respect the neighbors have for him.
- 3 A low, wide heated bed-couch common in north China.





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## Part III

# An Angry Youth

## The Fiction of Li Zhengzhong

In the turmoil of the times, there can be no tolerance for our silence or the pursuit of selfish enjoyment.

Li Zhengzhong, *Nostalgia*



Wedding day, 20 April 1943.



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# 11 Literature and My Life (1945)

Article in lieu of a preface.

[Li's short story collection *Bamboo Shoot*]

I am very ashamed to draw together my life and literature, to discuss them. No matter what, I always feel that there is some kind of overstepping, even though there is nobody who really comes to criticize my shameless boasting. I also always feel that, after all, the matter digresses too far. "Literature" and "my life" – between them, the distance is not so close.

Perhaps part of the reason is that from start to finish I have not thought of the ambition to make myself a writer! Of course, there are many objective factors that exist to bind me thus, but here I wish to confess to my friends: My resolve is that I do not have the ambition to be a writer.

I am confident that turning myself into a writer is an extremely difficult course of study. In the past, I was a passionate apprentice of literature. In those times, I did not hesitate to damage my health for a deep reading of a masterpiece. I once also gave up regular conversations for writing endlessly. This kind of life of reading books and writing, writing and reading books, fully supported my final three years of school life. In those three years, I threw myself completely into dizzying piles of pages of books and manuscript papers. People who expect in the future to achieve becoming a writer, perhaps could take these as happy memories, yet thinking about literary pursuits gives me such pain and tension, even these memories are all bitter.

I still remember one time, when I consumed three sleepless days and nights writing a newspaper's literary text, due exactly during the preparation schedule for the summer examinations. Even when it was time for me to go to bed, I could not stop waving my pen. The result was an unendurable fatigue. In the examination classroom I unexpectedly became disoriented, causing a foreign friend to give me a handwritten teasing slip of paper: "Although your body is here, your heart is just taking a walk around South Lake with a young girl!"<sup>1</sup>

I really forgot everything. It was as if for these three days and nights I did not exist among that group of people. I totally immersed myself in a stronghold of deep thinking, letting me temporarily receive the same fate suffered by the stories' protagonists: joy, happiness, dreams, meditations, loneliness, pain, and despair. Youth's dreams are so beautiful, but youth's dreams are also easily smashed to

pieces. How can people who are faithful to their dreams climb up from the deep ditch of their desires toward the edge of their dreamland, while mulling over the taste of pain...

I use my pen to create a new crowd of life. I also use this new crowd of life to hone myself.

This new crowd of life has infected my heart with joy.

I also remember one time when I travelled to the old capital city. That was a rather memorable time for a final journey in the old town. One autumn evening, in the day's cold wind, my friends and I were strolling on the evening street, pedestrians were few and the shops' doors were locked up. Cold feelings attacked our flesh. No matter who, I thought that all of us were planning to go to a bar that evening, whatever kind of filthy lowdown spot would be fine. Surrounding the stove, we, this once, could drink delightfully, exhausting all the resources in our pockets to buy drinks, to commemorate this autumn travel! Like this, on the street we were blowing into our hands walking, walking along so many lamp-lit evening streets. Finally, in the end we stopped in front of an old bookstand.<sup>2</sup> We glanced at each other and started flipping through books. Although the bookstand was not big, it had so many books that regular bookstalls did not have. Especially unexpected, I found a four-volume hard-cover set that I had explored for everywhere for a long time and had no news of this long translation. Carefully rubbing the light-yellow front cover of the printing, I knew its cost probably exceeded the liquor money prepared for this evening to get drunk. But I finally bargained with the bookseller. As if that bookseller comprehended my situation, the answer was that what I wanted could be had with a cheap sale for me. Just like this, we completed the transaction. Under my arm was a not too small paper package. We continued walking on the evening road with a white, freezing, blowing mist. The inside of our hearts was hollow: Where to go? We walked without a sound. This evening, we used our puny leftover change to buy some black cakes and water to fill our stomachs. The next day, before it was bright, we set off from the old city.

This memory makes me remember it forever and never forget it.

Besides that, so many painful memories remain under my pen, luring the tip of my pen. But here I am not willing to write bitter words about literature. I always consider, as if I bring up the above kind of matter, that literature has a strong power toward my spiritual life.

These three years of my life have certainly given me a great enlightenment. At the beginning, toward the adventure of literature, I had a "try it" mood. To think about it now, although I feel it is a bit frightful for that not yet established self-believing youth to go to the dazzling path of literature, the stubborn courage and power for literature at that time now makes me have limitless respect for my past. Three years of a life of continually reading books and writing gave me a commitment of hard work and resolve for literature. At the same time, it also gave me a most valuable belief, which is: It is difficult to become a writer. This not only relies on a bit of intelligence to be able to do it, and it is also not all about a passion for literature, one also needs constant life experience, support from life and one's own living history.

Especially today, in the atmosphere of literature flooding in, a volunteer literature apprentice can read several world-famous masterpieces or write several

volumes of creations, but is that fulfilling? Even though we cannot tell the premise of today's literary world and cannot run onto the dance stage of literature – if, to speak of literature's respective dance stages – what is the object of the market price for our literature? We must ask ourselves: What do we think, read, write – what are they all? Contradict yourself, abandon yourself, make yourself dazed every day in between thinking and action. We, what are the qualifications and constraints for ourselves to still go onto the path of a writer?

For two years, I put down my pen. I put myself into deep thinking for this long. Let someone say that I am sinking. I cannot let anyone's words blindly move me. I always think this way: I should be quieter. On a long journey by foot, I must not exhaust myself the most in the middle. At deep thinking time, I just think deeply!

Like this, my life and literature have just completed a contract again. I prepare so much time to attend to my deep reading, and I devote so much time to practice writing. In my back room is my bookshelf. Besides for work, I stay in front of my bookshelf to arbitrarily flip through it. When I get bored, I can rely on the window to look out at the city streets. Since I have used it at dusk too many times, I am very familiar with the twilight scene outside the window. No matter whether it is those many earthen houses and windows, or the tall stacks of hay inside the doors, in the morning or at night the poor men raise their burlap sacks in front of those little earthen houses – these more or less constantly float in front of my eyes. I think that there must be a day when I will understand their lives. I think it is not bad for me to turn my thinking to the little scenes in front of the window.

Sometimes I do not plan to write something yet I cannot help but raise my pen again. That time is mostly in the evening, leaning against the window, turning the light on, the deep evening time when there is no noise. I am peaceful, so I can think for a long time. Perhaps in a long time I am able to write something, perhaps I am not able to write something, perhaps I have not written something when the sky starts to lighten.

When my thoughts change into printed words and run again in front of my eyes, my joy is no less than it was in the past. But I cannot fault my pen and I cannot fault my conscience; this kind of writing is often bitterly produced.

From start to finish, I am this stubborn to my path. Now it is like this. The future is also expected to be like this. Although the ambition to make myself a writer still as before does not exist, my passionate enthusiasm for literature cannot decrease! If a writer cannot give their entire life beliefs to literature, their development eventually will be far from literature. If I can elevate the journey on my path, I am ready to deliver myself to literature.

Wei Changming, on an early snow day,  
in a little building on East Gate Road.

Xinjing 1945

## Notes

- 1 South Park is a famous recreational area in Changchun.
- 2 *Shu chuangzi* is, literally, a book bed.

## 12 Li Zhengzhong: Bamboo Shoot (1945)

“A Progressive Writer’s Special Creation.”

### One

Depressed, Zhang Shuguo pushes open the window.

In front of the house is a garden. After a night’s rain, countless curved grooves are printed on the loose soil. Leaning on the corner of the fence against the wall, a little pool formed long ago. Quietly exposed to the early morning sunshine, a thin layer of mist steams up from it.

These enter his vision and immediately he casts his boredom away. He looks at the sky, so clear and cloudless, like a blue sea, peaceful and stretching into the distance. He stands still, as some sort of restless feeling invades him. He is immersed once more in memories of the past.

- --- Ten years, twenty years, it is just a dream!

In fact, it is already something that cannot be casually abandoned. He has a wife, has a child, has enough private property to provide for life. While they give him a trace of consolation, he also feels that his age has increased from the old days. Although he is not elderly, he knows that aging will come. The seasons have their laws, and there is no way to evade them.

Wordless, he stands in front of the window. For some time, he is motionless.

### Two

Morning increases his loneliness.

His child, Qiming, went to school as usual. After breakfast, his wife went to the street to buy food. Left alone, Zhang Shuguo is like a sentimental ghost in this empty old courtyard.

He shivers and opens the seal of the Zhang clan’s dusty genealogy and reminisces about past luxuries. But that time passed so fast, as winds scatter clouds, leaving no lasting traces of hundreds of people, hundreds of acres. He was born in the last years of the sad decadence, and he has always been praised by his predecessors because, in embarrassing situations, he exhausted all his means, exhausted all his wisdom, to exploit others, to squeeze others, to seek money, and to seek

positions. In the eyes of others, he is a success. He really brings honor to his ancestors.

However, he is puzzled. He starts to totally deny the past, owing to his recent understanding of history as a rut that constantly buries the world without emotion, generation after generation.

If he were a bit younger, he could give voice to his pain. But now he cannot because society's teachings have made him into a hypocritical selfish worm, always very arrogant and reserved, even with no way to go.

So, all he can do is bear a very deep guilt.

### Three

"Jieping! Come sit for a while!"

Suspiciously, she walks to his side with a strange look that he is familiar with and then sits down.

"Jieping, how many years have we been together?"

"Well, ten... In all, sixteen years!"

As is his recent habit, he raises his dispirited eyes and turns his gloomy face toward the graying outside the window.

"Sixteen years! Yes, such a long time. Jieping, during that time did we have anything different from now?"

"What is this, such serious talk?"

Impatiently, partly with a feeling of abomination, she knits her eyebrows.

"I want to think about those things." He solemnly raises his head, speaking in a monologue: "At that time, my name was Zhang 'Learning Wisdom.' I cherished a fiery hope and to make my hope a reality I patiently deceived and mutilated a lot of good and kind people!"

He is a little agitated.

Tears crisscross Jieping's face. "Don't think about it! You are scaring me, I'm in agony!"

"No, I have to carefully think about it, what have I done over the years! Jieping, maybe only you can forgive me. Now is the time for me to repent, before I go to my grave, what else needs to be done? I have served as an official several times, I have started several businesses, and I have been considered by others as an extraordinary member of society, but what is the glory in this? I scoundrelly fawned, I proudly trampled. I, am I not a goddamn bastard?"

He starts to sob silently. At this moment, only tears can cleanse his conscience. It is not by accident that he discovers himself to be a hypocrite in disguise, depressed for so many years.

When he returns to normal, Jieping faces the mirrored bureau, wiping her tears. He walks next to her and gently says, "You will forgive me, our son is a confirmation of it. He inherited our wisdom, but he will never pass on the sins that occurred in our generation!"

He cannot say for sure, but he is thinking like this: The past is like a storm of wind and rain. Let it go!



**Four**

This shadow quickly slips from his heart.

Jieping's melancholy increases a lot; she is always so silent. Day by day, her complexion pales and often when she works, she has a slight cough. Very concerned, Zhang Shuguo considers reducing her work fatigue by using optimal remuneration to have a female worker come and go, to manage the household operations. Jieping's illness is very strange; day by day she loses weight. A doctor was invited but he could not diagnose what kind of condition it is, only giving nourishing food to eat and to increase physical strength. However, there is no effect.

"People say that love ages people easily. I've never been in love, but I'm aging too." She looks at her reflection in the mirror, and sighs sadly.

"You're not actually aging. If you rest for a while, you'll be fine. Aren't you still as young as before?"

He kindly assures her because he loves her now.

"Lies at any time are still lies. I know that I should wake up for once. Why let a person have a stifled heart forever?"

To now, he can offer only wordless silence.

**Five**

That night, she wants Qiming to sleep by her side.

"Child, you have grown so big, mama really likes that."

Stroking the top of Qiming's head, tears of joy drip down.

"Ma, don't distress yourself so often!"

At first, he receives his loving mother's caresses. He lies in her arms, facing up and looking around. That withered, yellowed face is like fallen leaves after a frost.

"Yes, I should not worry myself, but once before I locked my youth inside me, and now it is nursing a flash-fire revenge on me. Child, shall I tell you a story?"

Qiming nods confusedly.

"It was many years ago. A girl grew up in the fetters of the old ritual teachings, but she really had new longings. She dreamt of flying away, as she was gifted with cleverness and wisdom. She wanted, just like other New Women, to jump out of the cage she was imprisoned in. But fate was excessively mean to her."

Her face blushes. In her eyes a strange brightness flows.

"In a competition for dominance in officialdom, she was ruined in the hands of a man. She was forced to marry a rich and powerful man because her father was fiercely scheming for position."

Here, she pauses a bit. She hears the neighbor already start to snore lightly. She takes a sip of bitter tea from the teacup in front of the bed, and then carries on speaking.

"At that time, when she received that violent devastation, her age was so young. The union between her and him had not a trace of emotional connection, it was just to satisfy his desires. And he also sinisterly dispatched to a distant deserted city her family, which abandoned their daughter. Later, news from them was cut off... ah, the years since then were so boringly passed away!"

Qiming holds her hand, a tear drops on his face.

"She didn't want to live. She cried, she couldn't endure that tyrannical whip. She thought like this to discard a pitiful life! However, a child was born at that time. This child's birth destroyed her desire to kill herself. She had to have a little responsibility for bringing up the child. Only on the child's body could she see a long-awaited spark, and she would endure to live on."

"Ah, ma, why do you cry?"

"Sixteen years, such a long time. Heaven knows that she did not pass a day of joy and happiness. Perhaps she may soon be quietly buried."

Wronged and sad, she cries. Then she turns off the light and, trembling, she holds and kisses Qiming's face.

"Child, that man is your father!"

## Six

At 15 years of age, Qiming has grown so tall.

His character is always gloomy. No, this would suggest that he inherited his character, but he grew up in the disruption of two eras. The impression given to him by the past is too vague, he only remembers that in those years he was happier and more generous than now.

He has a mother, but it is as if he does not have one. She is so coldly static in the house, as if a lonely statue. Even to her own child she does not change her character. He has a father, but he never says a word to his own child, he is always so perfunctory: "My old-fashioned thinking is not suitable to tell you."

Qiming grew up in this kind of environment. He is smart and enthusiastic, yet these years of knowledge have not satisfied him. The more he understands, the more he is bewildered, so he does not hesitate to determine to throw his life into books. Gradually he makes new discoveries.

But his gloominess makes people feel a kind of stress that lets people understand his background while also letting people deny the existence of his character.

## Seven

The summer season arrives. The Zhang family's courtyard is even more trapped in loneliness. Jieping's emaciation casts the biggest shadow on Zhang Shuguo's life. Even if he resolves his past nightmares, there can be no repentance. He fears this odious fate and even more fears for this unfortunate woman. The whole day, he ambles beside her body, telling her lots of laughable stories, although she does not laugh once.

"You are tired! You should rest."

This tender rejection exacerbates his hammering conscience.

"Jieping, until now, will you still not forgive me?"

She looks closely at the current Zhang Shuguo. He is indeed different from before. Perhaps old age brings people torturous memories, as he desperately begs a desolated woman for forgiveness.

Then, he closes his eyes.

"Jieping, forgive me!"

At first, she is moved by him. Her exorbitant rage toward him turns into mercy. She thinks that just because he once did something wrong, should he be punished forever?

"No, I do not blame you, this wrong is not yours. Who let us grow up in such an abnormal century? Shuguo!"

She wipes his tears as he cries again.

"You must recover well."

"I'll be fine. This autumn, we'll go on a trip."

She tries hard to restrain the trauma in her heart. After a moment's silence, she suddenly remembers something and whispers softly, "Can you promise me?"

"Dear, you just say it, I'll always promise you, whatever you want."

"I, I'm missing my parents who I don't even know are alive or dead."

...

"You what? Do you believe that I shouldn't be thinking like this?"

"No, but, where to go to find them again?"

Wearily, he closes his eyes. Sixteen years, such a long time of uncertain shadows, painful images...

## **Eight**

Qiming returns from school, to break up with his excitement the surrounding, deathly quiet, siege-like atmosphere of the house.

"Ma, are you a bit better today?"

She waves him over to sit in front of the bed. Her face fills with joy. Smiling at her enthusiastic impulse, she begins to think that she should not have abused this lovable child these many years.

"Qiming, do you have any complaints against your mother?"

"Ma! Why are you asking this?"

"Because I may not live very long. I do not want everyone to be nostalgic about me, but I hope that everyone can understand me. I am just this pitiful – I appear ordinary but I'm no more than a character in a tragedy."

She quietens again, her face is wan, drained of all color.

"Do not ravage your body anymore! Why do you always distress yourself so?"

At dusk, the maid turns on the light. As is his custom, Zhang Shuguo goes outside for a walk. In this room, reflecting the pale grey ceiling as if it has lost the colors of the past, only much loneliness and sadness remain.

Qiming sits silently, dispirited, immersed in a kind of deep thought.

"Child, what are you thinking? You cannot mourn my generation. What have we done? Get rid of this punishment that should be reserved for hedonism, it's time to rest a little earlier. What comes next is your generation, only yours has the expectation of reverence."

Qiming gratefully trembles. Childlike, he falls into Jieping's arms; he truly does not want to cry but he is soaked in tears.

"Ma, then do I not need kind care?"

"You need it, and that must be from one of your own generation."

"If no... that is to say, is there a woman who will present her first love to me?"

"Love, can you truly love her forever?"

"I think so."

"Then, marry her. Ah, my child, how blessed you are!"

She kisses his forehead. Her eyes fill with tears.

## Nine

Under a light, Qiming writes a letter:

Liuba,

I tell you some news. Mama has allowed our friendship, moreover she says that we can get married. Are you joyful? Tell me.

Your Qiming

He puts it in a letter tube. Lying on the bed, he is unable to sleep for a while. He takes a book down from the bookshelf and starts to read.

His chest floods with many complicated emotions.

Whether it is the sad state of a martyr's biography, or the weak cry of the city's commoner class, everything stimulates his vision and even his perceptions. He knows that he is no longer in a vain self-existence.

"It is our era, lovable Liuba!"

He presses his chest tightly with his hand.

## Ten

After the advertisement searching for her family was published, newspapers gradually accumulated on the bedside. News, but still somewhat vague.

This poses the greatest threat to Jieping's desire for life. The whole day she anticipates some stranger knocking on her door. She presses her face against the glass window frequently and looks outside. At this time, wild roses bloom in the garden in front of the house.

The seasons pass so quickly. Again, it is autumn. Golden primroses decorate the front. In the garden, sunflowers sway under the sunlight. Day and night are so unbearably long.

Jieping foresees an unfortunate fate, just as autumn winds destroy the flowers of life.

She no longer wants to have long conversations, although Zhang Shuguo persuades her to travel south to perhaps bring some change to her tedious life. Moreover, autumn at the seaside is also a good time for tourists to gather. However, everything suffers her reasonless refusals.

She consumes less medicine. She gets even more annoyed and declines the doctor's diagnoses. Day by day she becomes weaker and weaker, which makes her nostalgic for a world that is becoming increasingly indifferent.

"I come with emptiness, and I will go with emptiness too."

This lonely refrain often falls from the corner of her mouth. She tries hard to yell out from the bottom of her soul but, again, pain reduces her courage.

Just like this, she spends her days, pouring her time into meditation.

## Eleven

Late autumn brings an end to everything. In front of the window a layer of red and yellow leaves piles up. When the wind blows by, it brings lonely sounds to memory. The garden is cut off and naked, leaving a desolate plot. Jieping seems to regain her complexion.

"If I can get through this winter, then perhaps next year in the springtime I'll be fine."

She faces Zhang Shuguo directly. Her desire to survive repeatedly torments her as she thinks that she has not yet arrived at her fated end. She wants to see developments in the future. The temptation of a new dream blazes in her heart.

"Oh, yes, you'll be fine."

He looks out the window, thinking that the sorrow of old age has invaded the flow of his blood and will make it coagulate.

Ah, lonely old age.

He thinks, what kind of significance is there to the rise and fall of the curtain on this human drama? Is this just a sudden discovery? No. Did he so suddenly step into an inevitable arrangement?

He paces and then sits down beside her.

"Can we talk for a bit?"

"Talk about what?"

"I seem to be chased by the loneliness of old age. Even taking a breath is not relaxing. If I have to gasp for breath, I am not terribly interested in it."

"Are you tired of life?"

"On one side, maybe."

"However, you should not forget one person."

"Yes, you are younger than me. Speaking of youth, I am pained, it is I who harmed your life." His heartfelt words increase their emotional connection.

"Don't talk like this. You treat me well and you often have the greatest patience with me."

It need not be said, but to Zhang Shuguo these tender words are a kind of indictment. Meekly, he lowers his head. For a long time, neither of them says a word.

## Twelve

Three people sit under a lamp, drinking coffee. They are very happy, very different from the past's series of dark days. They exchange all kinds of anecdotes and trivia – truthfully, they involve Qiming's personal problems.

Just after ten o'clock, Qiming returns to his room.

This night, they sleep together in the same bed. Before she goes to sleep, she swallows a glass of strong whiskey. A loveable reddish color spreads across her face, then at once flows through her awakened body.

They sleep peacefully. It is not yet midnight when she wakes from a dream, her fingers tightened around his, shaking him.

“What? Do you feel bad?”

He uses one hand to raise his body, looking hazily.

“I am very thirsty, come give me a cup of warm tea.”

He is wearing his pajamas. Shivering from the cold night, he brings over the warm water bottle and without waiting for the tea to pour out, he suddenly glimpses a peaceful bitter smile on her face, making him run in consternation to her side. Her raspy throat vaguely pronounces: “I have come with emptiness, and I will go with emptiness.”

...

She opens her shining eyes, as if greedily searching for something.

Expressionless, he shakes her. Then he uses his hand to touch her chest and then her forehead. Everything is calm and icy. The wait for Qiming to run over was already a long time. He does not cry, he does not even shed a single tear. What use would it serve? Those who have lost the meaning of life just follow the end of an era to pass away.

### **Thirteen**

After a few days, a new grave is added to a burial ground.

All around is built a cement railing. In the middle is a thick iron cylinder. Beside it, except for a short stone tomb, there are only several lines of black characters inscribed: You came with emptiness and left with emptiness.

In addition, several rows of funeral wreaths are displayed to accompany this new grave, to send off the distant years.

Zhang Shuguo continued to endlessly repent his past actions. It seems as if he has buried a vivacious person in the cemetery with his own hands. He is in pain. He cannot confess to another person this hidden internal remorse that increasingly advances his aging.

When he walks into that courtyard, that room, he is pained to the point of madness. He uses his handkerchief to cover his cries, but it cannot cover the lake water-like attack of emotions.

So, he makes a new plan, this plan can be said to be a quiescent evasion!

He starts to discuss this with Qiming: “Year by year I am aging, and I am also so discouraged. Everything in the past was like a nightmare, I wish to be forever distant to that. I think that I should take advantage of these later years to take a rest for myself and to redeem my past sins. So, I am leaving tomorrow.”

“Father, you can’t do that. I am so young, and I still need someone to teach me.”

“Things have already been decided. Although you are young, a youth’s life should have full opportunities to freely develop, it cannot be constrained by any old ways. Moreover, eventually you will have your independence. Child, you will properly see your path!”

“You cannot do that, father!”

He shakes his head and then goes to lie down.

Early the next morning, traces of Zhang Shuguo have already been lost. The things placed in the room are exactly the same as before. Only a wedding photo is gone, leaving a dark picture frame hanging there, empty and imposing.

A piece of paper lies on the table: *I have gone. Maybe I will not return. I kind-heartedly entered this world, but I carry a lot of sin around. I am not infuriated, nor am I complaining. All I have is pain!*

## Fourteen

Again, spring returns.

The earth steams with the thick aroma of soil, willows are cast with a layer of delicate green. In the outer suburbs, farmers start the year's cultivation. Once again, spring decorates the world anew.

Qiming and Liuba – a healthy and beautiful girl – tread down a sandy path, slowly, marching as if carrying the silence and power of the earth.

This is a rather narrow suburban road.

He walks with her. Now and then, she pants from slight exhaustion and innocently gazes at his face. Just at this time he thinks about many past matters, those matters that he had thrown away and yet occasionally climb into his memory.

He looks up at the sky, she also looks up at the sky.

"Are you looking at the clouds in the sky?"

"Uh."

Walking on the road, it seems as if he has forgotten the other people on the road.

"So, you are looking..."

...

"Are you looking at how fast they fly?"

At this time, he makes a surprise turn and peers like a dream demon into her beautiful eyes.<sup>1</sup>

"Yes, you see! How fast it flies! That one is as thin as a string of yarn."

Pointing at the sky, a team of wild geese crosses their field of vision.

The spring sunshine, splendidly warm, throws people into an intoxicating dream. This sky, these trees, the wind, this soft soil.

"Liuba, I'm a lonely child now."

"And me? I have a family, but it's the same as if I have no family. Aren't we having the same bitter experiences?"

They walk past a road, and he and she stand for a long time on a bridge.

"So, don't we have something worth crying for?"

Early spring ripples appear on the water. He picks up a small stone and casts it down.

"Qiming, why do you keep inconspicuously perplexing yourself?"

He brushes his dishevelled hair with his hand, looking at a row of ducks floating on the water, drifting past the bridge's wooden piles.

"Liuba, I'm in pain!"

"Why?"

"I think that the times just press down on our heads. We can't escape, we can only tolerate it, only use blood and tears to concentrate attention on our work. However, Liuba, we'll lose that sweet, selfish dreamland."

Qiming tightly knits his eyebrows.

"Qiming, you can't think like that. Yes, we should shoulder that heavy pressure but while you still have not completed yourself, you cannot be excessively negative or positive. You should work hard to complete this stage, then let's boldly do some things. As for selfishness, can you still love again?"

"Your words are correct, Liuba. Then I resolve to continue down my road that I have not completed but, also, you should always give me enthusiasm and encouragement."

The wind, the cool fresh humid air, flutters across their faces.

"Believe me! Didn't the same bitter experiences shape our future arrangements, Liuba?"

Sunlight comes down through the willow branches. He opens his dream-like eyes and revisits his surroundings, admiringly. Lightly using his hand to caress his broad flat forehead, the power of life erupts in the bottom of his heart.

## **Fifteen**

He silently walks into this room, and then again into that room. Empty, he is just left such a lonely child.

In the evening, the female servants sleep in the outer room.

He opens a window. At this moment, his heart is calm. He has neither sorrow nor worries, unlike those many nights in the past. His negativity is really stopped by a new beginning, which gives him a more rational perspective on life.

He sympathizes with his mother's unfortunate experiences, but he can no longer let those weak recollections distress him. He is grateful for his father's life-long struggle. He also resolves that the method of that struggle, and its goals, more or less should be reviewed. As for the sins and errors of history, following the appearance of new trends, they will totally, silently flow away. They are even worthy of regret.

The era ahead will not let go of anyone.

Qiming knows that he himself is a member of the newly arrived era. He uses all his mental capacity to unearth a new path because he knows that the old path is unpassable. It has been buried in history.

Nearly emotional, he remembers Liuba's words: "First complete the current phase." Perhaps it is necessary. No, rather, it is certainly a universal answer.

Relaxing, he breathes in the night wind. When he turns around, he eagerly takes down a book from along untouched bookshelf. When he opens the title page, his touch rips it but he can still recognize his father's handwriting flowing on it.

He turns to a folded page, along a thick black line of cursive writing is a line that he reads: "The future belongs to you, your lives will be easier than ours. You will not be forced like us to find our path in the dark. Go struggle, go fall, and get up again... You only have to work, only have to carry it out."



He closes the book, he slowly closes his eyes, as if he hears the old era. A farewell to the new era is to be prayed for. But he murmurs: "No, our life is not so easy!"

## Sixteen

Spring also passes.

Then again, so do summer, autumn, and winter. A series of ongoing changing seasons carries away many people's hopes, depressions, and dreams while also bringing forward the discovery of so many people's expectations and hopes, and the never-ceasing generation after generation continues. Before the shaky end of a life, Qiming and Liuba are still having more youthful days. How can they live meaningfully? These two old embryos are growing new seeds just like taking on the responsibility of building a historical bridge. What kind of giant force should be used to complete the connections and glory?

One era passes, another era unfolds. This matter is difficult to explain but it should be appropriate for youth in the new era to question! Are there any people concerned about his or their future footsteps?

Then turn fervent eyes to detect reality! Then just give them a certain answer! This is not a complete story.

This is an intermittent prelude to the mighty era in the grand replacement of life.<sup>2</sup>

Mid-July, Nanling, Xinjing

## Notes

- 1 A dream demon (*mengmo*) is a malign spirit believed to plague people during sleep.
- 2 The last four sentences are in the original publication, but not in subsequent versions.

## 13 Rude Reality (1945)\*

In the deep autumn season, in the piled-up fallen leaves, Liu village is lonelier.

This village is in a boundless wilderness, like a narrow graveyard surrounded by a three or four foot deep earthen moat. Above the earthen moat stand unevenly tall willow trees, both thick and thin. Entering autumn, the fallen leaves vacate their twigs, they fall and drift slowly, spinning around in the autumn wind, layer by layer, as if to bury Liu village in the mouth of the moat.

From the early morning, Liu Qing has been packing firewood on the bank of the moat. From time to time, falling leaves hit his reddish-purple face and his exposed chest. That sturdy muscled flesh bulges, twitching from time to time due to the tiring work – it is a healthy and beautiful depiction of labor's struggle for life. He does not stop bending over, stowing deadwood and decaying vegetation with a rake. It is not until noon that he first straightens his body, takes a deep breath, and leans his rake against a tree trunk. Bean-sized beads of sweat run down his face and chest.

“Motherfucker, it's autumn again!”

After the autumn harvest, under Liu Qing's eyes, the field is flat and expansive. On the ground are only scattered particles of grains and short knotted weeds, quietly exposed to the late autumn sunlight. One year is tortuously muddled through like this. Then he thinks again of winter. As well as the crops that he must hand over to village head Li for rent, there will only be 220 pounds of red grain and beans left to sell. That is not enough to make a set of cotton clothing and, also in winter, what to eat? The dark shadow of this life covers over his usual smiling expression. Yet again, subconsciously, he is almost accustomed to it.

“All this is the doings of my ancestors! Motherfuckers, dog fart bandits, do they force me to starve to death? I have to find village head Li to figure out the bill...”

In fact, legend has it that this Liu village was once occupied by a great Liu family. However, the era of their rise and fall has arrived. Stories of the past also slip in people's memories. Now Liu Qing is the only one named Liu to be found in Liu village. He is also a single, poor man. He lives in an earthen house that leans against the inside of the moat, and every year he cultivates the land of the village

\* This story was originally published as “Taixian” (Moss) in *Xue yi* (Art studies) 1 (February 1941). The title was changed with its 1945 publication.

head Li. If he gets enough food at the end of the year, then he regards that as satisfactory. Everyone in the village knows that he is a good person; if you ask him to do something, there is nothing he will not do. Everyone also knows that he is a fool, because the village head Li often scolds him: "You are so foolish, tomorrow get the hell out of Liu village!"

He always smiles emotionlessly. Later, everyone doubts that he really is a fool – if he is, when disparaged by someone he would answer!

Today, Liu Qing again recalls village head Li's cunning face, so he fiercely hawks out a mouthful of spit, cursing in a low voice: "Old bastard, you bully me, you'll see whether or not I'll forgive you!"

As if he spat out a breath, he uses two hands to tighten the belt around his waist and sticks out his chest. That eternal thought hovering in his heart emerges again, he thinks about how to drive away that village head Li, how he can put things aright. Although this has some excessive expectations in it, he thinks – only in this way, only then, can he face his ancestors, only then...

"Elder brother Qing!" This cry suddenly wakes him from his distraction. He turns his head as a girl from the village runs over from a small path.

"Be careful, don't fall!"

"What are you thinking about here again?" Her smile always gives Liu Qing limitless comfort, especially as the two eyes – black, gleaming with tears eyes – turn on her face. He seems to see the light of hope in her eyes, as if a warmth passes through her entire body.

"Wasn't thinking of anything, Girl Cui."<sup>1</sup> He says Girl Cui's name out loud, lowers his head, and observes his ragged clothes. On his face he feels an unnatural burst of burning heat. He really does not have the courage to approach Girl Cui.

"Elder brother Qing!" Her head hangs down, and she leans closely against Liu Qing's sturdy body. "Today that loathsome old man Li came again! And he told my baba to ask me to marry their son, Jingui."

"So, what does your father say?"

"Later, I did not hear clearly, but it is likely agreed. As you may know, the grain rent that our indebted household owes will never be paid off. Besides this method of using me to discharge the debt, baba said there is no better way." When Girl Cui talks, her voice is almost too weak to be heard.

"Then you must also want to do this?" Liu Qing makes a supreme effort to inhibit the fire in his chest, intentionally mocking with words.

"Elder brother Qing, you accuse me too wrongly!" Girl Cui cannot stop her tears from dripping down. Crying from being wronged, she simply leans on Liu Qing. Observing her shaking shoulders, Liu Qing feels a kind of non-dischargeable responsibility, then he calms down and even appears to forget the excitement that had just occurred.

"So, what are you going to do?"

"I, I... I don't want to marry them." The determined Girl Cui lifts her tear-streaked face. Intently gazing at Liu Qing, she places a woman's only real small hope in the hands of Liu Qing.

This matter makes Liu Qing deeply ponder a long, long time...

"This is only..."

“And, how?”

“I only have to beg your father to marry you to me.” He says these words, without the courage to look at Girl Cui, because he understands that this is no more than a kind of dream. He is afraid that reality will not be as easy as that.

“Okay.” When a person has no path to go on, casually talking about an obstructed path may achieve approval. Girl Cui, in a mood of consoling herself, does not answer.

The sunlight gradually moves past, gloom on the earthen moat brings a cool breeze. Neither he nor her know what they are thinking. Silently, the fallen leaves swivel again on the ground, jumping.

“I’m going back!” Girl Cui lazily stands up. She waves a hand toward Liu Qing, slowly following again the path she had come on, going toward the roads of the village.

Liu Qing keeps watching her as she turns past a courtyard’s earthen wall. Only then does he draw in a breath, picking up the rake again and gathering the wind strewn firewood branches. He takes out the baskets that were put out in the moat in advance and loads them with his hands. He is still thinking about the matter of Girl Cui. He also thinks that he really needs this kind of wife to help him. He cannot watch her marry another person.

He just filled a basket and is carrying it, about to go back, when village chief Li takes a sturdy step to walk in front of him. Then, he sneers. That smile makes Liu Qing tremble, and he puts down the basket, standing upright as if waiting for someone’s order.

“Hmph! Is the firewood in the moat yours? And you do not wait word from me, you just casually come and pick it up. This... this simply does not recognize me as the village head!”

“No, village head, I, this is...” Liu Qing stammers.

“What this is, this is, you have completely thrown away the face of your ancestors, and you still have the nerve to talk! This Liu village does not want you, tomorrow – get lost!” He says this and the flesh on the village head Li’s ruddy face moves up and down in one fell swoop.

Liu Qing cannot say anything, he thinks – how could he have lost his ancestors’ face? Should he not struggle for a bit, and give others a sight to see?

“But didn’t Girl Cui just come again?”

“...”

“Say it, yes or no?”

“Yes, but it’s not me who asked her to come, she came on her own!”

“Regardless of why she came, from now on you’d better approach her less! You should know that she is my daughter-in-law, is village head Li’s daughter-in-law. If you don’t listen to me, be careful or your legs will be broken!” After he finishes speaking, he then gives a smile to make people tremble and leaves, swaggering away on the fallen leaves in the evening mist.

Liu Qing sits powerless on the pile of firewood, staring wide-eyed at the houses and dusk smoke from the kitchen chimneys of Liu village. Everything in his memory is trite, he now feels suffocated by, and loathes, this trite life. He becomes lost in wild and fanciful thoughts...

Until the autumn sun swipes the tips of the forest, he remains dazed, quietly sitting in the moat. In the evening wind, leaves fall on his body.

## Two

It is the time that breakfast has been eaten in the village. Liu Qing, carrying two bags of red paper tickets, walks into Girl Cui's courtyard.

He did not have a peaceful night's sleep, as if did not even close his eyes. Listening to the cry of the wind shaking the leaves, he laboriously remembers once more those years with his father that he had forgotten – that beautiful past time in his life.

Whenever he thinks about his past childhood, it is always to recall an inexpressible sweetness. He still remembers clearly that his father was so tall, how his speaking seemed like a big bell, how he tenderly cared for him. At that time, his family lived in village head Li's courtyard, the classiest in the village. Far before, he could not recall distinctly but since his memory has become relatively clearer, he had the most beautiful and youngest mama, although she did not love him very much.

This happy life, at the outset, could have been lengthened for a long time but just when he was eight years old, his father became ill due to age and weakness, and his young and beautiful mama left then. His father's death started an extreme transformation in his life. From then on, he had not another happy day in his life. He was spurned by people and village head Li – once his father's close friend – took possession of that spacious real estate. Besides that, others scattered like the stars and clouds. So, Liu Qing continues to age in this gloomy life. He makes a supreme effort to forget those, yet he often thinks about how he might restore his ancestors' reputation, how to make Liu village become stronger day by day.

Time is an angry swindler that can take unfair advantage of people. His frightened insights gradually fade away, as well as his hopes. Several times he wants to get out of the circle of his life, thinking that outside of it there may be a spring, but truly he is in love with Girl Cui. Over the years, the comfort given by Girl Cui has become a force in his life. Perhaps he could not survive losing it and, in the end, he continues to live like this.

Liu Qing's emotions are violent ones. Sometimes he hates village head Li and Girl Cui's father and others like them who have no conscience. Before, they so frequently visited Liu's house to hypocritically flatter Liu's father that they almost wore out the household's threshold. Once his father passed away, this group of people joined to demolish his happy nest. He really thinks about it this way: One day, he wants to settle the score with them.

If not for a special compulsion, for a long, long time he did not dare remember the past stories. Whenever he touches upon his tender memories, there is no way to quench his anxious weeping.

Dawn is coming. As usual, he gets up, makes breakfast and, after eating a few bites, he puts down his chopsticks. He feels panic in his heart. He cannot swallow. He carefully tidies up the dark moist room, puts on his rarely worn blue jacket with open slits in place of sleeves, and takes out the two *yuan* he earned in the summer for his occasional shoveling labor.<sup>2</sup> He exchanges them for two packages

of snacks, and he has four copper-nickel coins left. Harboring in his mind a trembling mood that cannot be said to be happiness or fear, he steps into the threshold of Girl Cui's house.

He is welcomed by Girl Cui's father. He seems to be thinner and weaker than before, but his two small and nimble eyes have an inner light. With hazy, blank feelings, he lets Liu Qing into the upper half of the small living room. He starts some unfamiliar social niceties.

"Uncle Wang is doing very good?"

"Very good." Following this, he uses a hand to twirl his beard.

"Me, I'm very busy, all kinds of matters have to be taken care of by myself, so it has been a long time since I have paid respects to uncle. Really, too..." These completely fictional words, so unnatural for Liu Qing to say, bore the receiving party.

"Everyone is the same." The yellow, withered cheeks twitch slightly.<sup>3</sup>

Both the host and guest are silent, as if for a while nobody can find anything to say. Little by little, the early morning sunlight climbs up the paper window. Before long, it lights up the small room. Liu Qing bathes in a bright fog, his body has a touch of warmth.

"These two packages of snacks are especially bought for you." He thinks of the mission that he has come for this time. On one side he pushes and arranges the two paper bags on the table and on one side thinks of words to continue with. "This is a younger generation's token of affection..."

"This is not necessary." The words decline the gifts, but his hands lift them to the cabinet cover.

"Is there any other matter that you came for? I have to go out in a while."

"Nothing, nothing... but it's a bit presumptuous, it's just... has Girl Cui settled on marriage?" Liu Qing's face blushes, his heartbeat is injurious, as if his heart could race out of his mouth.

"Not yet. Why?" He is astonished by this sudden question.

"Ah, not yet, then uncle...could you marry Girl Cui to me? I..." He also thinks to say that he has such an abundant life, but this lie trembles on his lips a few times and then disappears.

"What? Who?" As if he cannot believe that there could be such a matter, he suspects that he heard it wrong. If not, then it was said wrong.

"It's me. Can't Girl Cui marry me?" Liu Qing mumbles.

This time, the host can hear clearly. Immediately a disdainful ugly smile emerges from the corner of his mouth. He gets up from his chair. His eyes turn to Liu Qing's face, as if to explore some little secret. "You, but I ask – what do you have? You're just a poor person. You're not much better than a beggar." He coughs slightly. "Girl Cui is my daughter, if there are two roads, one goes toward heaven, one goes toward hell, what road can I let her go on? Can I let her suffer? You are the biggest do-nothing. Marry you? Huh, a pauper! She would suffer for a lifetime!"

This severe rejection and ridicule gives Liu Qing a wound greater than pain. He cannot sit down again. With cold, bitter eyes, he says goodbye, leaving behind a series of contemptuous taunts: "What a shameless fucker, look at yourself in a

puddle of piss. Take a good look at yourself, and you still think that you have good taste!"

...

Liu Qing has no courage to listen anymore. Like that, he staggers toward the path back.

For the first time since the arrival of autumn, he feels cold. He shivers lightly. This chill permeates his heart. No matter how fast he walks, this cold pursues him as if to harden his veins.

He thought of what should bring this autumn to an end. Already he has no sadness or joy. Reality has taught him: A person's luck cannot be expected; only by using one's own strength can one strive to make a life.

He is thinking, walking. When he stops his steps, he already stands outside the big moat surrounding the village. So, he walks slowly, lonely along the earthen moat.

As before, the luxuriant growth of the flat field unfolds before him. Occasionally, he sees some wild grass seeds scattered on the autumn field. He cherishes these solid lives and clasps them in his hands. He puts the choicest ones back in the ground, fallen leaves whisper.

### Three

For two days, Liu Qing does not go out to pack up firewood. On the third day, he moans sickly on the *kang*.<sup>4</sup>

His head burns. All day and all night he is trapped in a comatose state. His mouth is very dry, he wants to drink water, but his broken calling out with a hoarse throat cannot satisfy even this minor wish. So, he struggles to climb down. He thinks to go to the side of the vat in the outer room for a few sips of cool water to clear his head. Not even taking two steps, following along the *kang*, he turns, paralyzed and, facing up, falls to the ground.

He knows nothing more. In this state, he sees village head Li with his appalling smiling face thrashing his willpower alongside Uncle Wang's callous gaze. They are like two sharp blades slaughtering him in a cellar. At the same time, there is a ridiculing and taunting warble by his ear like a tide of water: "You, you pauper, you dare to think of this? What a shameless fucker, you have completely thrown away the face of your ancestors!"

In a daze, he falls asleep, unconscious on the ground. Sunshine brings an early morning and again throws in a dusk. He is gradually awakened by a sound.

"Elder brother Qing! Elder brother Qing! Wake up! Elder brother Qing!"

His head sways, his upper body is lifted and without strength lowered down. After a while, he seems to wake from a nightmare. He opens his dimmed eyes.

"What's wrong with you? Lying on the ground, won't you get a chill?"

He starts to blurrily observe a woman's arm, and then he sees a beautiful woman's face once more. Further, he perceives that teardrops remain on that face. Only at this time does he recognize that it is Girl Cui, Girl Cui who was not forgotten in his soul's dreams.

"I, I want a sip, bring me a bowl of water, will you?" His voice is gravelly.

"Better first to lie on the *kang*! Come, I'll help you up!" Girl Cui uses an arm to support his neck. Strengthless, he struggles to stand up. Approaching the side of the *kang*, he rapidly falls inward. Girl Cui immediately brings him a pillow.

He gasps, gasping like a dilapidated old person.

In the outer room, Girl Cui boils water. She is so enlivened to be working, but also from time to time she glances at Liu Qing lying on the *kang* in the inner room. Although her heart is covered with a layer of depression, she still thinks that so long as elder brother Liu Qing is beside her, she will not lose her hope. She is only thinking about how to make elder brother Liu Qing healthy.

When Liu Qing awakens again, a half-lit oil lamp lights the dark room. Girl Cui helps him to sit up and brings him a bowl of just cooked corn congee.

"Have some congee! ... It will get better."

Liu Qing looks at Girl Cui's face that has been reddened by the fire's smoke. Teardrops of gratitude flow onto his cheeks from his deeply sunken eyes.

"Cui! I put you to too much trouble, I really cannot put my feelings into words..."

"Why are you shedding tears again?" Girl Cui gracefully uses her handkerchief to wipe away the traces of tears on his face. "I hope you pay attention to your body, wait till you get better, then our matter can certainly be well handled."

Liu Qing, after so many years in a callous world, experiences a bit of affectionate warmth. He feels a little more strength in his body. In relief, he drinks a big bowl of congee.

Outside the window, the autumn wind moves back and forth.

Beside the oil lamp, Girl Cui lowers her head in contemplation, her two hands continuously fiddle with her glossy black braid. Soon after, she raises her face, and quietly says to Liu Qing, who is leaning against the head of the *kang*: "Immediately after you walked out of our house, my baba agreed to village head Li's marriage and said that the ceremony will be the day after tomorrow."

Upon hearing these words, Liu Qing's face has an extraordinary spasm. His blood starts to boil again. He grasps Girl Cui's hand with a deadly grip, as if words cannot speak all his thoughts.

"Cui, let's go! We'd better leave Liu village!"

Girl Cui, after a moment of shock, recovers again her original calm: "No, elder brother Qing, I believe that fate will not break us up, we should give the future to fate!"

"Fate, Cui, what is fate?"

"Elder brother Qing! I feel a little terror, I don't have the courage to do that, I fear such a dark night." Girl Cui opens wide her two eyes, cringing, looking at every corner of the room.

"It has to be you and I together, Cui! You must not be afraid, I have the strength, I can handle them, you must believe me!" Liu Qing's eyes flash bright. This brightness illuminates the future path of indecisive Girl Cui, who is in the dark.

"I always believe you. But where can we go anyway?"

This question, Liu Qing has no choice or option but to carefully think deeply about it. He supports his forehead with his hands. After a moment of contemplation, he finally finds a path to the future.



"Cui, you do not need to doubt. We just need to firmly stand up and walk on our path, we will never hit a snag. You, Cui! Can you suffer?"

"As long as we can live together, I'm willing to endure all the suffering in this world, but..."

"What?"

"I always thought that this is somewhat dangerous. I'm a little afraid!"

The autumn wind blows. Falling leaves hit the paper window.

"Not at all, there is no danger."

"Then, when will we go?"

"The day after tomorrow! The eve of the ceremony. Midnight! I'll wait for you outside the main door of your house."

"Oh, then we'll escape and ought to have happy days!" A torch of hope shines in Girl Cui's heart.

"Then, just arrange it!"

"But what about your illness?"

"I'll get better in these two days." Liu Qing stops leaning against the wall above the *kang*.

"You should go back. This news must not leak out!"

Girl Cui cautiously nods her head.

Late autumn evenings are so short. When Liu Qing sees Girl Cui out, the Three Stars arrive above their heads.<sup>5</sup> It is exactly midnight.

He tightly holds her hands, then she walks away, like a fallen leaf.

## Four

Liu Qing suddenly awakes and twists about.

He feels pain throughout his body. From the sunlight pouring in through wooden planks, he sees blood stains on both hands and his chest. He is bewildered. This trance is a dreamland. He wants to go out and see where this is, but as soon as he stands up, he falls down. At this time, he carefully looks and sees that his feet and hands are tightly bound, not allowing him to move even a little bit. The pain in his bones makes it so that he cannot help falling down.

Gradually, he remembers. It was yesterday, the night agreed upon with Girl Cui. As the sky darkened, he packed up his things into a small package, anxiously longing for the night to approach. The night was exceptionally long.

It was almost the same as the moment when he saw off Girl Cui that night. Liu Qing carries a package on his back and, in his hand, he carries a mountain vine stick. After saying goodbye to the small earthen, shadowy house that he lived in, he walks toward Girl Cui's courtyard.

The path is so silent, not even a shadow of a person can be seen. In this lonely village night, Liu Qing approaches the door of the Wang family like a ghost. He leans his ear in to listen, but there is no sound at all. People are all peacefully sleeping in the autumn night.

He peacefully waits, counting the fleeting shooting stars.

When he thinks of this last night in Liu village, how precious are memories! He avidly gazes at everything in the nighttime Liu village. He thinks: "I'll be back, and I'll be back soon."

However, conflicting feelings reproach him. He recalls those past days, he recalls the wishes that he once had, he simply wants to cry his heart out, but he does not dare.

Little by little, the night pulls over a dark curtain.

Liu Qing stands for a long time as the deep night's wind invigorates him. Just at this time a big door opens and out comes a black shadow. He greets it with no suspicions.

"Cui?"

That shadow did not actually answer, but walks straight to his side, then solid fists and feet strike Liu Qing's body, and a shout: "Come on! That young guy is here!"

Only now Liu Qing realizes that he is in a trap. Without thinking, he begins hitting with his vine stick. It cannot be helped but a crowd of people flock out of the courtyard. Some hold his legs, some pull his hands. In the end he is like a wild animal caught by a hunter.

Several lights burn in the courtyard immersed in darkness. Liu Qing is pushed and pulled down the steps. He clearly sees village head Li standing there, shouting in a stern voice: "Liu Qing, how dare you be so brazen? Do you think you can hide it from me?" This echoes in the night wind like the cry of an owl.

Liu Qing is infuriated. Although he cannot break free from the binding ropes, he uses all his strength to bellow: "You thing without pride, you deceived my father, you skillfully took my property! Motherfucker, everything my ancestors left has been stolen by you! You are a thief, you won't even allow me to live, I have to fight you!"

In front of many servants, village head Li unexpectedly receives this kind of insult, so he resorts to a cruel means of revenge. "Beat! Beat this young pauper to death for me! Okay, motherfucker, you dare to curse me!"

At first, Liu Qing still resists the whip, but he is gradually exhausted, he is dizzy, then he falls down, knowing nothing. When he wakes up, the pain in his whole body recalls to him last night's memory. Before his dazed bloodstained eyes, he sees that this is a wooden shed.

Although he thinks that perhaps this kind of wordlessness and uncommunicativeness is to destroy a person's life, he does not feel much sorrow because he did what he had planned. As long as there is eternal faith, to make the last fight for life, this cannot be counted as a failure.

He looks at the moving shadow of the sun. He thinks of Girl Cui again, he knows that she would not betray him. But where did she go? Has she been subject to the same kind of imprisonment? Or is she looking on without lifting a finger?

In his fury, he wrenches open his throat and violently shouts, but nobody takes any notice. He only falls down in despair, looking at the round ceiling. He tries, too, to untie the rope's knots, but without any result. His hands tremble greatly, the rough rope ties him as tightly as an iron bar. He is allowed no escape.

As the evening enters, or perhaps because of an overcast sky, the shed darkens.

He shrinks in a corner and listens to the whistling autumn wind. Looking out of holes in the planks, the outside is as black as ink. There is not a single star in the sky.

The evening is silent. A layer of drowsiness and exhaustion pounces on him.

He does not sleep for very long when he is awakened by the opening and closing of the door. He tightly clenches his fists, preparing a defense to the death.

"Don't make a sound!"

A familiar tone crawls into his hearing. He still looks carefully at the shadow that came in. When the shadow presses up to him, he identifies that it is a woman, moreover it is precisely Girl Cui.

"Be quiet! You have to go." Girl Cui leans down in silence.

"Go, yes, I have to go. But tell me, what happened last night?" In the dark, Liu Qing touches Girl Cui's hands.

"Elder brother Qing, you suffered too much, this is all my fault, I hurt you." Girl Cui wails and leans against Liu Qing's body. "Last night, just as the sky was darkening, I was locked in a room. I was not released until this evening. I heard from the mouth of a servant girl that you are here. I stole a key and ran over."

"Cui, then let's go together!" Liu Qing regains excited emotions.

"No, you go first! You find a place to make a home and then hurry back quickly to find me. Otherwise, neither one of us can escape!"

Nervous, he gropes for the scissors brought by Girl Cui. The scissors release the tied-up Liu Qing. Two people quietly follow the earthen wall to set off with soft footsteps. They appear out of the back door.

"This is for you to use!" A stack of banknotes is stuffed into Liu Qing's hand.

"Pay attention to your health. I'll come back." While speaking, Liu Qing's shabby trousers are unable to stand the invasion of the evening wind. He fights the chill.

"Quick, go! Don't let anyone see!" Girl Cui anxiously waves her hands.

"Don't forget me!"

One hot teardrop rolls down Girl Cui's face. With a few steps, that thick black shadow disappears.

## Five

After a snowfall, everything is buried in the field. Also buried is a sound scattering in the wind for many days – the news that Liu Qing was captured and escaped.

Instead of this, it is the happy period of Girl Cui's wedding that approaches day by day. In the courtyard of village head Li, a lofty canopy of happiness is raised. The people managing matters fill the center of the courtyard to overflowing. Village head Li's rosy face is exceptionally shiny. Laughter unceasingly blows into every person's ears.

On the eve of the first two days before that happy period, a northwest wind blows with chilly snowflakes, bringing winter's bleakness and severe cold to this village. By the next morning, poplar catkin-like snowdrifts obscure roads in the village and fill the earthen moat surrounding the village. Girl Cui withdraws from village head Li's close watch and disappears.

It is said that someone saw Liu Qing on the night of the snowfall. Because he was befuddled, drunk as drunk can be, and speechless, nobody carefully observed his actions until after the discovery of Girl Cui's disappearance. Everywhere in Liu village was searched, yet the shadow of Liu Qing cannot be seen again. Outside the earthen moat remains a boundless, vast expanse of white, snowy open country.

At this time, Liu village is completely sealed in quiet. The eleventh lunar month comes, snow descends layer by layer to entirely bury the soil and that vacant low building under the moat.

## Notes

- 1 Girl Cui is called “Cui *guniang*” (literally Girl Cui) – through most of the text. Only a few times is the name given without Girl.
- 2 *Yuan* is a unit of Chinese currency.
- 3 Yellow, withered cheeks are suggestive of opium use.
- 4 A *kang* is a low, wide stove-couch used for heating, cooking, sitting and sleeping in north China.
- 5 One of the 28 mansions of the Chinese constellations – akin to Orion.

## 14 *Nostalgia* (1941)

### One

Jin Xiang is in a motor vehicle returning home. His heart is as if blinded by a blurry haze, which separates the stirred memories of past joys and miseries from some longed-for dreamlike hopes for the future. Nothing can be seen anymore, nothing can be gained, letting him fall deeply into the abyss of a void.

However, the progress of his journey will not be delayed at all because of this dispiritedness. Outside the window, the lush green scallion fields, sparse villages, ruined fortresses, trees, mounds, all are pushed behind, row by row, side by side, and the road ahead really stretches endlessly. Jin Xiang sometimes, occasionally anxiously, looks out the window. The near-noon sunlight just now covers his broad face. Although a few insignificant wrinkles are imprinted on his forehead, he still maintains his youthful and heroic demeanor. From under thick eyebrows flows a sharp line of vision. When that line of vision is cast to the valise in front of his feet, he is repeatedly suppressed by an inexplicable feeling, trampled over and again, unable to find a proper answer.

Jin Xiang is completely sunk in a contradictory consciousness. He himself cannot understand why he has embarked again on this return journey; he just feels like the past is a dissipated dream. Now he has escaped again from the circle that lost his ideal life. Again, he has no joy nor is he sick at heart because of the many roads he should take in the future, he cannot clearly distinguish if they are smooth or dangerous and difficult. He only throws himself into the torrent of life, despite that torrent transporting him to unknown places.

When he tries his best to get rid of these cumbersome thoughts, he is dazed, he pants for a breath of relaxation. Just now, he sees sitting across from him an elderly lady from the countryside. The aged shape of the face lets Jin Xiang again subconsciously cherish the memory of his grandmother – do not get even older because of your age! At the same time, he comforts himself again by replying to himself – she will not, it has only been a mere brief seven years since leaving home!

In fact, seven years in the stages of human life already cannot be considered short. At that time, Jin Xiang was even younger than now and more excited. It was the year when he just came out of primary school and a scourge of banditry spread through the peaceful villages in this area. He can still vaguely remember walking out one autumn early morning, to start the first step of a professional drifter.

Grandmother carried a bundle for him, seeing him off all the way to the village's west well, then sobbing in an aged tone, "Child, outside can never compare to home. Be careful in everything. When you have no money, quickly send a letter."

The words remain in his memory. To now, they have not diminished. He was once moved to tears by the words, tears that splashed on that strange journey and they became his courage to seek hope. For several years, he just embraced this courage to find a way ahead where there was no way and continued a life that was not quite stable.

In the meantime, the scourge of banditry washed over Jin Xiang's hometown village. The destiny given to people is always so strict, it actually made Jin Xiang and his family break off communication, so he lost even that insufficient supply. Reluctantly, after graduating junior high school, he got a job.

Perhaps the imagination of young people is excessively beautiful. This fate gave Jin Xiang only callous and loathsome feelings. He dislikes the despicable and filthy morbid state of all so-called customs, he is also not used to a "*mahjong* and coffee" luxurious lifestyle. In the life circle of the community, he is like a lonely outlier, wandering about unhurriedly in a constrained circle of books and self-thinking at home, taking a break.

Two years ago, from the mouth of a person from his hometown, he learned news of his only family member finding a place to settle down. At that time, he originally planned to return to take care of her, however he was just then crazily, passionately in love with a middle-class female worker, Bai Xueru. In the past, he had always denied love, perhaps it was because the provocations given to him by the vicissitudes of life were too excessive, but now he transferred all his energy away from his job and put it on the woman's body.

The high tide of their romantic love was progressing so fast, it was rumored outside that there was news that they would marry. Even Jin Xiang himself really regarded Bai Xueru as his future partner. A happy family then dazzled before their eyes.

Two months ago, all the problems and rumors were resolved. Bai Xueru was already out of Jin Xiang's embrace, married off to be a daughter-in-law in the house of Zhao Dayou, a rich man, well-known on the street. Apparently, the man was just an eighteen-year-old child.

Jin Xiang does not hate her at all. He knows very well how unfortunate what happened to her is, the path that she must pursue is a narrow and obstructed burden. She has a mother and a younger sister; they need her to support them. What a difficult matter it is for a woman to strive for a life in society. In the end, she weakly sacrificed herself for the lives of the others she loves. However, Jin Xiang's increased bitter hatred of society makes him curse the destruction of this creature. He often thinks about a future big solution. But it is all over, everything is dust.

This love affair, Jin Xiang feels that he could only have an empty dream, throwing to him the melancholy and grief of mourning the loss of a loved one. So, he cherishes the memory of his hometown's warmth. He wants to lay beside grandmother, to continue those harmonious and happy days. Irrationally, he set foot on the homeward bound vehicle.

The sand road winds like a belt. Attracting the anxious looks of travelers, Jin Xiang's heart is beating very fiercely. He cannot think of his homeland after the change. Is it still possible for the familiar to give him some kind of comfort? His return this time is nothing more than to satisfy his love for his native place and village.

Beside his aged grandmother, he frequently thinks of two classmates from elementary school: One is Li Shuang, who is said to be an elementary school teacher and the other then is the neighbor to the east, Hui Gu.

Li Shuang's character is like his name – Bright – he presents quite forthright. He should be counted as Jin Xiang's best friend among his classmates. The evening before Jin Xiang went far away, Li Shuang had a long talk with Jin Xiang, all through the night. Although some of their thoughts were ridiculously naïve, they then pursued the hope of life, it shone so brightly in their hearts. For their ideal life, they must always stay strong on the path of life.

That night, the candle flame shone, reddening the children's cheeks. Li Shuang was silent for a long time, then fiercely pressed Jin Xiang's shoulder: "Don't get dragged down anymore by dark days like this! You should go, perhaps there is a spring for your life outside."

What more can Jin Xiang say? He whimpers at this consolation of friendship. He would like to say some elegant and stately parting words, but he does not know where to start. From start to finish, he parted from his friend this silently.

What about Hui Gu? She is the daughter of the next-door family of Aunt He. When children, they played games together. When they went to school, they were students of the same grade, which naturally facilitated relatively close relations for the two.

At that time, Jin Xiang still did not yet understand what love is. He only felt that Hui Gu has many characteristics that make him happy. He frequently took care of her because some rascals in the village often bullied Hui Gu. He handled those rascals.

Children's love could achieve the practice of marriage between two families. Jin Xiang's grandmother and Hui Gu's mother already expressed this intention in words, but it was not formally declared, that was all.

In these seven years of dispersion, when Jin Xiang thinks of Hui Gu, he feels the apprehension of life again. A pretty, floating image moves in front of his eyes again. He thinks that she has grown up, become stronger and another person's wife.

He regrets deeply – why did he have to leave? And why does he have to return? He dares not think about the past or future again. He just intently watches this reality of gloomy, cruel and cold, hopeless days. He is like a worm that has lost its mind, confused for no reason.

He gradually closes his eyes and feels melting in the warm sunshine. The vehicle speeds along.

Just after noon, the final willow tree-lined village spreads out before his eyes. Jin Xiang takes account of the muddy courtyard wall and the big willow tree in front of the village as if nothing has changed. He gently lifts his valise.

The vehicle enters the town, he squeezes down among the crowd. Just now, the sun shines on his face.

## Two

Upon Jin Xiang's return, this silent as a grave life starts to flow with a touch of lively vigor.

All night long, grandmother does not go to sleep. She turns off the kerosene lamp and interrogates Jin Xiang in the dark. Jin Xiang looks at the trace of a flare dancing on a cigarette ashtray and, from the aged voice, he realizes how frail grandmother is.

The elderly person has seemingly boundless love for this child returning from travel fatigue.<sup>1</sup> There are long-winded stories of the countryside's bandit chaos in the past few years, changes in the village, and management of her own land. Unceasingly, repeatedly they crawl into Jin Xiang's sense of hearing but, soon after, he is tired out and starts snoring loudly.

Early the next morning, when he wakes up, grandmother has already gone to the vegetable garden. Jin Xiang lazily gets up from the *kang* and approaches the south window on the ground floor.<sup>2</sup> He pushes open the old-smelling paper window, and pure, fresh, slightly clammy air rushes in. He enjoys two deep breaths.

Outside the window is a field. He hurriedly washes his face and puts on a long gown that he never had use for and walks toward a trail in the poplar forest.

Daybreak in the countryside village is so lovely. Dewdrops on leafstalks exposed to the sunlight glitter, the wind gently hangs back on the field. As Jin Xiang walks on this path, a rarely seen smile appears frequently on his face. Sometimes, he picks a few kinds of wild rose flowers, madly sniffing, and then abandons them on the side of the road.

After crossing this path, just now in front there is a wide road sandwiched by a poplar tree forest. He gradually slows his footsteps. As he paces along this road that is less than a mile, here there is no early morning sunlight, but a gloomily waving depressed air current. The wind whisks the treetops and dewdrops drip like sparse rain. Jin Xiang returns to contemplation again, pacing slowly.

At the other end of the forest someone comes, a quite thin fine silhouette with a bamboo basket. Jin Xiang keeps staring at this silhouette after he sees it. Then his heart begins to jump wildly. He sees clearly that stepping close to his side is a woman. Furthermore, he suspects that this chance encounter may be a ridiculing dream.

"Hui Gu!" In the end, this familiar form of address bursts forth from his mouth.

"Oh!... Is it elder brother Xiang?" The pretty and charming face is full of wonder and apprehensiveness, her tone then vibrates as if with a pulsating cadence.

Jin Xiang nods. Both are immersed in memories of the past. This is the middle of the forest, and only he and her stand, motionless. From the bottom of his drooping head's hairline, Jin Xiang looks at Hui Gu who still has the same charming eyes and apricot cheeks as before, which does not at all subtract from her virginal demeanor and makes him twist out many empty premonitions.

She asks haltingly: "Then, when did you come back?" She does not raise her head at all, her hands hold a bamboo basket.

"It was just yesterday." Jin Xiang wants to say so many things to Hui Gu, but it is as if he forgets for a short while, earning him a blushing face. "Are you alright? Oh! Is auntie also very healthy and strong?"



"Thank you, actually she's very healthy and strong."

The perpetual silence of the other party makes Jin Xiang feel a slight suffocation. He cannot help but carry on the conversation.

"Returning this time, I don't want to go away again because life outside isn't as beautiful as I imagined after all and, moreover, it's such an exhausting and numb life. I wish to pass happy days at home. Hui Gu, you should understand me, I'm the same as before..." Just now, his words suddenly stop. Hui Gu's reply brings to a halt what he wants to say.

"Oh! Elder brother Xiang, I really like for you to live in your hometown, but I'm not what you hope for, I really don't know how to say it – I'm already..."

"You what?"

"I'm already engaged by mother to the Huang family in a village to the east." When Hui Gu weakly casts her gaze at Jin Xiang, in her eyes two tears rotate, but do not fall out.

"Ah!" Jin Xiang says, as if woken from a dream. A string of sweat pops out on his forehead. He takes a sharp breath and jumps. He could not have imagined it – he feels that all is lost. He returns Hui Gu's weak look. When Hui Gu lowers her head, he turns around and, saying nothing, hurries down the path.

"Elder brother Xiang! Wait for me!"

"..."

"I still have something to tell you!"

"..."

No matter how Hui Gu shouts her throat out, Jin Xiang does not turn his head. He dashes along the path with sloping footsteps, dew soaks the corners of his socks and the front of his jacket. Along the way, sorrowful emotions choke him.

All his fond dreams before going to sleep last night are destroyed. His pain at this time is greater than his indignant resentment when Bai Xueru left. He even feels at a loss about this distant return. All thought hammers him, all thought divides and ties him up. He stands in a trance in the position of a loner cut off from the human world.

When he walks in the house, grandmother has already prepared breakfast. The rectangular table on the ground floor is filled with fresh dishes and several specially boiled eggs quietly arranged there.

Jin Xiang is so moved by grandmother's great affection that he feels speechless as grandmother urges food to him.

"Child, eat! City meals may be more palatable than this, however, this is our home's harvest and I always feel a kind of special taste when I eat it."

"I am eating! I love to eat these the most, you eat too grandma!"

At the dinner table, grandmother eats and talks about how grateful she is that a few people in the village helped look after her in the past few years, especially Mother He, who helped her plant the garden and manage her affairs. Finally, in the end, she talks about the question of Jin Xiang's marriage.

"Child, you're also getting older, year by year! It's not at all that I want to hold great grandsons, I don't earn any honor from that saying: 'Man should take a wife, woman should take a husband.'<sup>3</sup> The elderly always feel that is a weight on one's mind until it is completed. Our family is this small, my eyesight is getting worse

day by day, stitch and sew, sweep and do – where is there that we don't need someone? Anyway, this time you're not leaving! Count on me to find a suitable girl, settle it and you'll just marry!"

"Grandma, I might have to leave in a few days."

"Huh? Silly child, where are you going now? Where's your home and relatives? Stop stirring up trouble! I'm already muddle-headed, maybe I'll die soon! I live to breathe day by day – you just listen to me and spend the days by my side. When I die, you can go east again or flee west, as you please!"

Jin Xiang does not have the courage to plead his case again. He knows how grandmother could only abide the hard days these years for him. He cannot make the elderly person excessively sad again – reproach from his conscience forces him to stop speaking. He silently puts food in his mouth.

Grandmother waits for Jin Xiang to stop making a sound. Once again, on her already long dead, cold and quieted, cherished desires, the flowers of hope bloom. She calculates to utilize the money she put aside these past few years for Jin Xiang to marry a beautiful wife. That girl's temperament will be so gentle, virtuous, and dutiful, and she will treat the elderly person with etiquette... The hallucination of that scene spreads out before the dim eyes of the elderly person.

In her heart, grandmother is very happy, and her appetite follows – to increase sharply. Jin Xiang puts down his chopsticks just as grandmother energetically fills another bowl full, conveying it to her mouth.

"What? Are you full? Child."

"I usually only eat two bowls – today I ate a half bowl more than usual! You eat, slowly!"

The time for meal service is early in the village. When Jin Xiang watches grandmother finish tidying up the furniture, the hands on his watch point exactly to half past six.

Bored, Jin Xiang opens the book boxes in the corner, and flips through those old and shabby, disorderly elementary school textbooks, and some sets of the *Four Books* and *Five Classics*.<sup>4</sup> From here, he unearths again a lot of memories he never thinks of. He carefully reviews each label pasted on every book or pencil drawings on the cover of each book, that let him kiss again some of his childhood companions. At this moment, he feels that he has returned to that group of his richly interesting, honey-like childhood.

This consolation cannot long continue for him. He inspects it all over and over, and ultimately that thick dust-covered box door is covered up. Everything is locked again in the tomb of ancient times. What is left to him is the desolation and depression of reality.

Jin Xiang leans against the wall, his eyes naturally turn to the distant farmland. His heart is very clear at this moment as he carefully mulls over the early morning's unpleasant encounter.

Just then, grandmother's call interrupts his deep thoughts. "Xiang, see who has come looking for you!"

At the same time, there is a familiar tone from courtyard.

"Jin Xiang! When did you come back?"

He just pushes open the door and there is the body of a man who is not at all tall, wearing a long-brimmed straw hat with an emaciated body wrapped in half-worn-out Western-style clothes. He carefully identifies the face. It is who he was just thinking of, Li Shuang.

### Three

When people walking on two different life paths meet again, their feelings are often easily excitable. In just this emotional impact, Jin Xiang and Li Shuang continue their talk throughout the afternoon.

While it had still not arrived at the time for farming families to eat dinner, Jin Xiang's grandmother specially made some wild vegetables for them. Wine cannot be bought nearby, hence Jin Xiang accompanies Li Shuang to eat a simple dinner.

The sun just now shines obliquely in nightfall behind the willow forest south of the village as Li Shuang and Jin Xiang walk out of the room.

"This village is still so simple and so quiet!"

Li Shuang is astounded by his friend's inaccurate observation. At the same time, he seems to understand Jin Xiang's departure of the past few years: It was just no more than a cowardly escape.

"You still can't really recognize this village. Its interior has collapsed entirely. Although its appearance is still that of a struggling existence, it's already impossible to save it."

"How so?"

"You may think that this period is short, that's because you have not experienced enough. I'd like to show you how that village still beautifying in your consciousness is becoming destroyed more and more, day by day with each passing day!"

Walking on the path, the sun's rays redden their faces. Jin Xiang looks at lean Li Shuang who walks ahead of him and he feels infinitely ashamed. He is ashamed of why he had immersed his life in boredom and depression, and can he not escape that on his own?

Past guilt gnaws at the self-respect that Jin Xiang upholds. He looks at the dragged-out figure of Li Shuang as if he has lost consciousness while walking along the path.

Walking out of this path, ahead is an unkempt street, with several old signs and plaques erected on both sides. Li Shuang stands on the street corner and turns his head.

"Perhaps you still remember - there used to be a God of War temple here."

"Yes, but now?"

"It was burned down when the bandits entered the village, what's built now are a few grocery stores."

Not paying attention at all, the two walk, side by side, across the street. There are few pedestrians and businesses on both sides have already closed their wooden doors. A deathly stillness seals this small street.

From a dark alley, out turns a person singing wildly, with a glass bottle firmly gripped in his hand. After bumping into Jin Xiang's side, he stares fiercely with

reddish-purple eyes. Then, a few grotesque snickers make Jin Xiang have some strange fear of this drunkard.

"Ha, ha! You don't even recognize me, I'm Fifth Uncle Zhu! Aren't you Xiang? Ha, ha!"

The boozy smell of his words leaps thickly into Jin Xiang's sense of smell. He takes a few steps back like he is about to vomit. Suddenly, he remembers that the man had been a tenant before, a sincere farmer.

"Fifth Uncle Zhu! What are you, why are you drinking like this?"

"Ha, ha! Xiang, Fifth Uncle is not drunk at all. A little fox spirit has enchanted me!<sup>15</sup> Ha... don't laugh, Fifth Uncle tells you – a little fox spirit, it's just the thing!"

These akin to crazy words make Jin Xiang feel disgust for this conscious man's strange behavior. He wants to admonish him to go away. Behind him, Li Shuang gently tugs at his gown and whispers, "Let's go!"

After walking a dozen steps away, a night-owl-like laugh that grates on the ear still remains behind.

"Ha, ha! Xiang! You don't even know your Fifth Uncle! Ha, ha! Go ahead! Go and let a little fox spirit give you a share of its strength!"

Jin Xiang ponders how a person's transformation can be so fast. It is like a layer of frost suddenly falling on a summer's day.

"I really don't understand."

"In fact, it's no wonder that you don't understand, this change is too fast. Before, everything was so honest. Now, it's so perverse. Before, everyone was so hard-working and thrifty. Now, they are so debauched. All the people here are as if they don't know there is a tomorrow. Every time I walk through here, I feel like it is a ruined tomb. It makes me shiver!"

In the meager sunlight, a face flushed with indignant resentment can still be seen, and Jin Xiang listens attentively to the topic of conversation that continues.

"In the past, I always held a fervent hope toward this village. At that time, there was a female colleague, she once sympathized with my ideals and gave me the encouragement of tender love for about half a year. But now everything is over, she even sells herself to support her life, in which the anesthesia of tobacco and alcohol, exaggerated dress and personal adornments, and erotic pleasures are indispensable. She even wanted to defraud my soul, to own up to excuses for when she was lonely. So, I gave up all hope for this Willow Fort, I only dream that one day I can escape like you from this ruinous human state!"

Li Shuang's words conclude just when he is in front of a low eaves and he reaches out to open a door to let Jin Xiang in.

"Let's sit here!"

When Jin Xiang hears the coquettish sound of a woman's artful laugh, as he ascertains what this is, his forefoot has forged across the threshold. Behind, Li Shuang closes the door and walks in next to him.

Looking through the separating bamboo curtains, the furnishings are half new. A woman is applying rouge in front of a dressing table, just then turning to face the lamplight. Jin Xiang still hesitates. Li Shuang grabs the curtain in front and pulls it open for him.

"Ah! Shuang, who have you come with?"

That beautiful face is full of happy laugh lines. When she sees Li Shuang's cold and detached expression, she turns abruptly to quietly walk over. Jin Xiang's face is scorching hot.

"I must personally introduce, this is Mr. Jin, my closest friend." Li Shuang turns again to introduce Jin Xiang to the woman. "This is the woman I just mentioned. See, isn't she very pretty? Can't she be very capable at courting the love of men?"

Jin Xiang is reticent.

To be excessively derided in front of a new friend is especially embarrassing for a woman, so that beautiful face is completely thrown into the arms of the complaining, sneering Li Shuang.

"I thought that only you can understand me, who knew that you would bully me like other hateful men?"

Li Shuang still has a calm expression on his face. In his two open eyes, Jin Xiang sees a cluster of resolute youthful flames burning.

"Why don't you serve us?"

"Shuang, huh! I forgot!"

Jin Xiang once again looks closely at the woman's body. He feels that it is amply rich with a woman's healthy and pretty condition after all. He seems to understand, but he never understands, why a woman cannot be a complete person but, contrary to expectations, she is degenerate beyond repair.

Lush water vapor rises above the teacup, under a hanging lamp. Night has come again to the countryside.

Until he walks out of the wooden doorway, and hears a delicate "Goodbye," Jin Xiang had almost only said a word or two, and those were extremely reluctant.

Li Shuang is depressed by unpleasant emotions as well.

"Look in that earthen house!"

When Jin Xiang walks under the eaves of the earthen house, he hears loud shouting and clattering sounds. He sees through the door gap a group of people gathered around to gamble, and a few human shadows lying down in every direction on the opposite earthen *kang*. The house is enveloped in the smell of smoke from burning coal.

Jin Xiang shakes his head and steps slowly with Li Shuang on their way back in the night. From time to time, they encounter staggering drunk men making crazy drunken words, or the sound of a group of ghostly people squatting under the eaves, quietly mingling amidst the muted sounds of copper coins falling to the ground.

"This is just a portrait of the life of people in Willow Fort!"

Mournful thoughts and feelings stifle Jin Xiang and Li Shuang. When they stride forward onto the path again, step by step they walk toward the door of Jin Xiang's house, where Li Shuang puts his hands on Jin Xiang's shoulder and arm and says sincerely, "If possible, you better escape from this ruined home village fort!"

Jin Xiang holds Li Shuang's hand tightly, but he cannot say a single word of reply. The cold night wind blows on his moist eyes.

In front of the earthen house, they part hands.

## Four

The days after returning to the village crawl like a snake.

Except for conversation with grandmother every day, Jin Xiang just puts in order the things in the cabinets that he has not inspected in the past few years. Gradually, he also feels deeply tired of it.

At first, grandmother properly plans and prepares how to get him married and, moreover, asks someone to find him a commission at the county gate. However, all encounter Jin Xiang's rejection without reason. Grandmother can only sigh with regret that she is too old to understand the mood of young people and terminates some boundless fond dreams.

Jin Xiang himself gradually has some doubts – these few days, have they not all been lightly forfeited in the countryside? At no cost, his footprints traversed the length and breadth of this everywhere dissatisfying Willow Fort. Everywhere, nothing makes him merit being reluctant to leave. He definitely feels that everything in his village has changed, it can no longer give him who lives away from home the warm comfort that it had in the former times of his childhood.

He determines to return to the city to struggle again.

However, he wants to be able to see Hui Gu before he walks out. These days, he knows from Aunt He's words that Hui Gu's wedding is still a month away. He thinks that perhaps things can be retrieved, he wants to have a face-to-face talk with Hui Gu because of their last hurried meeting in the willow forest. He has so much that he wants to say that he did not say at all.

Just this early morning in the vegetable garden, Jin Xiang made an appointment to see Hui Gu at the end of the willow forest in the evening.

At dusk in the village, they lean against a willow tree, silently watching wisps of evening smoke fly up. On a windless June night, it is such a straight black line.

Jin Xiang is not used to this perpetual silence, so he gives rise first to the topic of conversation.

"Nightfall in the countryside is much more beautiful than in the city!"

"That is right! Especially for people who are used to living in the city. They come here occasionally, and even more do not know what to say!"

Hui Gu's expression is very solemn, composed.

"But, Hui Gu," Waiting for Hui Gu to turn around, Jin Xiang continues to say, "I will go back tomorrow."

"So, when can you come back again?" Hui Gu opens her long-lashed eyes and, full of hope, waits for a reply.

"Maybe, maybe I won't come back for a while," Jin Xiang thinks of returning in a hurry and going back in a hurry, also sick at heart, he restrains his hoarse tone. "This time coming back has made me fully taste the hardships of life. Some of the beautiful longings I ardently hope for and cannot bear to recall were squeezed to bits. I always thought that this village is lovely and I wanted to establish my new life here, but the reality is so cruel and cold that it strips away all my seeds of happiness. I can only go. Outside, there may be a spring for my life."

The silence of dusk surrounds them.

"I beg you to forgive me, this time I disappoint you. I can't accompany you to live that ideal life, but you should also understand how pitiful a woman's position is in society. Being easily dominated by others, I don't have any freedom at all!" It is as if Hui Gu wants to complain. Crying out the dregs in her chest, her body involuntarily leans on Jin Xiang's right shoulder.

"Can't things be saved?"

"Saved how? The dowry's been sent! The day has also been chosen! The words of the people here are so weighty, can I put forward a request to get rid of the engagement?" She feels that the road in front of her is only a deep black one, none other can be found.

"Hui Gu! You should also remember the days in the past when we were friendly. I expected that fate had already predestined our union. Who knows, I ran over here in vain from the distant city. What can I say now? I just hate that I am not even able to support a woman. I want to tear up the past, the deceitful memories of the past!"

Jin Xiang is indignant. He pants heavily, clenches his fists, and subconsciously thumps a tree trunk.

"You should be a little calmer." Gently, Hui Gu raises her neck and looks at the nervous expression on Jin Xiang's face.

"I can't be anymore; I should be violent! The truth is that I'm abused too much. I'm leaving tomorrow, I can't make it through here." In front of him, he sees again the whole village that is going into decline, which increases his courage to walk out.

Crows are sleeping well in the treetops, chirping in the approaching dim light of night. This willow forest, which is relatively distant from the town, manifests perpetual tranquility, like a sleepy cat at midnight.

"Elder brother Xiang! If you can really live with me, the only way is for me to run away with you." After a long time in Hui Gu's thoughts, she finally did not evade saying it.

"Run away?" Jin Xiang is bogged down in subconscious fear. For a while, a proper judgement and answer cannot be found.

"Right! Only by running away can we obtain real happy days of freedom."

Jin Xiang does not object at all to the effect of this act, but he hesitates at this illegal means. He mechanically even thinks of newsprint reports of actual events such as "absconding" and "abduction." He thinks that this is absolutely impossible. Not only does it implicate many people, but one would lose face and suffer hardship. One after another, this "happiness" and "freedom" tempt him with wonder, like ten thousand flowers. He is lost in this kind of dual consciousness. The more he probes, the more he feels the complexity of this problem.

"Don't we have a comparatively safer way to go?"

"There won't be, I think..."

"Carefully think about it again!"

"There never will be. Unless you and I escape this county together, we will never be able to live together.

"So, escape where?"

"It can be anywhere – isn't it the same everywhere? Anyway, as long as we can sell some labor, life may not be a problem." Hui Gu says confidently.

"However, I'm very afraid, I fear that something ominous will happen." Jin Xiang shudders. A horrible dark shadow stretches out its talons and fangs in front of him, as if to swallow the paltry human world.

"Well, then we have no choice but to break up forever." Disappointed, Hui Gu gazes into the distant darkening color of the sky. Clouds hide the moonlight and stars from view. Her customarily wide-open eyes gaze at the place beside her.

"Hui Gu, I can't just leave without you! I need a partner like you in my life."

Jin Xiang's contradictory feelings are intertwined as he painfully dissects the issues in this matter. Reputation and morality, crime and punishment, coerce him. For himself and for others, in the end he decides that he cannot do it so abruptly.

"Hui Gu, I can't take you to run away, because I still have to find a life in society. People attach so much importance to reputation and morality in this society! I can't lose the usefulness of those signs, please understand me and forgive me!"

With this unexpected answer, after Hui Gu is stunned for a moment, she stands up from beside Jin Xiang and, as if insulted by someone, she cannot help but sob in her heart. "I can't understand one person, I don't want anyone to understand me! Count it as I've had an absurd dream in vain. From now on, we'll never mention the past, we'll be strangers forever!"

Rapid footsteps do not allow for Jin Xiang's reply, as she is already on her way home. Shrugging shoulders can be faintly seen as she cries bitterly only for an instant, then that is hidden in the net of the night, in the distance it all becomes dark.

Groping, little by little, he walks into the house. Grandmother has already fallen asleep on the *kang* with a slight snoring sound. The oil lamp on the table flickers with sparks about to go out. Jin Xiang takes advantage of that light to take down the valise from the cabinet, tidy it up and, exhausted, he lets out a long yawn.

After lying on the *kang*, Jin Xiang cannot promptly fall asleep. He calculates in advance tomorrow's itinerary. Now he is not at all sentimentally attached to this long-separated village that he returned to again. He feels that he is still very young and should go out and do things that young people should do, so he clearly remembers the encouraging words Li Shuang told him and, imbued with consolation, falls deep asleep.

In the quiet night of the village, dreams also return to peace.

## Five

In a daze, Jin Xiang ran back to the city.

As soon as he wakes up in the early morning, he looks down through the window and sees on the bustling streets the tidal waves of this human world pushing and squeezing, vehicles and horses intertwining with the hustle and bustle of the modern streets, which induce him to remember again the long days in the countryside without people.

He really does not understand his actions. He went back empty and returned empty. Like a cloud without rain in an unobstructed sky, he makes another flight without a trajectory.



Now he does not have the extreme feelings of hate and love. He thinks that he is somewhat stupefied. As for why he ran back again to the city this time, it is not at all that he still has some preference for this city, it is just that he was bored of living in the countryside. This city is no stranger to him, so he walked back to the city's human stratum without thinking deeply.

Last night he dreamt of grandmother again. He recalled yesterday's breakfast. When grandmother had still not woken up, he secretly carried his valise to sneak out of the house. On the road, he looked back on the muddied paper windows yellowed by smoke. He was moved to think of the wistful longing of a traveler when leaving home, however he could not disturb the deeply sleeping elderly person. He was quiet, like talking to himself.

"Bless the bestowing of a happy dream to grandmother!"

Jin Xiang boarded the first motor vehicle that left. In the early morning, the village was dead silent, except for the men who carried vegetables and fetched water. The nighttime crowds of people could not be seen.

Before the vehicle moved quickly out of the street, he lowered his head. He was afraid to see his grandmother's withered face from the vehicle's window – that would obstruct his plan to leave.

He finally rests on a second floor in the city again. He tries his best to restrain his numerous and disorderly thoughts. For him, the past is at most no more than a topic during leisure time. For him to firmly grasp the future, he vows to establish himself first, that is, he believes that the existence of his being is now his only mission.

After he gets out of bed, he hurriedly runs into the telephone room downstairs. He plans to tell his friends Lao Tian and Lao Yang the news of his return this time, but neither of them is there, both have gone to work.<sup>6</sup> He carefully looks at the clock in the corridor. It is already half past nine in the morning.

His room is not at all ostentatious. Except for a bed and a table, there is only space for two chairs. Jin Xiang sits contemplating on the chair in front of the table, using his hand to prop up his head.

He thinks that on the first day after returning he should take a rest from the exhaustion of the journey, but he does not have a trace of sleepiness. His heart overflows with a kind of new excitement and stimulation.

He drapes his jacket over his shoulders and walks out of the hotel's door. The sky outside is clear, bright, relaxing. The brilliance of the sun and the already warm June wind cannot shake the roadside poplars' leaves. He walks on the street, all of the scenery is the same as before, and he casually walks into a small restaurant.

After breakfast, he returns to his room again. He takes out a stack of writing paper from his valise, unfolds them, and quietly writes a letter to the countryside.

Elder brother Shuang:

I have still not forgotten that night in my hometown. I was moved by your sincere contrast – I am ashamed of my cowardice and insignificance. Just like what you said, from start to finish I have had misgivings about life, and I have

not at all been able to honestly understand the crowd we live among. These few years of a vagrant life can only be memories of mine as a bitter person.

Yes, the people in Willow Fort have lost their unaffected lives and have fallen into an unsavable trend of decadence. They are collapsing day by day. I believe that, if it continues, sooner or later horrible misfortunes will be added to their bodies. Is there anything more pitiful than the decline of a lovely crowd? I hope, I am also enthusiastically looking forward to you wrestling without avoidance the inevitable destiny. The woman we saw that night, is she not in front of you the girlfriend who you must save? My friend: Don't hesitate anymore, horrible bad luck will come if you still do not stretch out your hand.

I ran out from my home village again. Of course, it is because so much unbearable pain made me unable to remain at a standstill, but it is also because my heart is beating strongly. We still have the warm blood of young people, and the errors of the era just need us to rectify them. In the turmoil of the times, there can be no tolerance for our silence or the pursuit of selfish enjoyment.

Let's encourage trusting each other! Elder brother Shuang, only if the whole society is safe will we have our ideal and happy life. May you start doing that from the countryside and be earnestly involved without slackening.

Perhaps I won't return in the near future. If you have something to discuss, please write to me. If you come here, please come to me. The address is written on the back.

Bless!

Jin Xiang, send in.

As he puts down the pen, the activity in his mind still shakes unsteadily. He himself feels that there are a lot of unreal emotions and excessive exaggeration in the letter, but he has to write those ideal words that his friend demands.

Then he writes another letter, to Hui Gu.

Young woman Hui:

Perhaps you still hate me now, and how can I explain this? Only Heaven knows a person's bottled-up pain. I will always be speechless.

I returned to the city again, at dawn yesterday. What I will do from now, maybe some people care, but I do not have the slightest specific plan, I just think that I should exert myself again and do some things that I should do. If you ask again what should be done, excuse me that I cannot give you a satisfactory answer.

First, I also once told you that the reason I returned is because of the temptation of that ideal life in the fields and gardens! I thought life in my hometown is tranquil and the crowds there kind and genial. In fact, it is the opposite. I lived there for only a few short days but suffered very grave despondency and suffocation. I had no choice but to step alone again on a drifting journey from the countryside.

I regret that I went back too late. I have been unfair to you, I have not given you a day of happiness or stability, I made you grieve for your calamity for almost a month, and I actually have no way to support you.

That night you walked away swallowing tears made the guilt of my conscience even heavier. I think that you may never understand me again – how I love you. What can be done about this? A wide social gap separates us.

Even at the end, I still, as before, have not decreased my everlasting hope for you. But how profound the criticisms from society would be! I resolutely did what I did for myself and for you.

Hui Gu: We cannot be happy people. I see your future destiny and tears drain away from the bottom of my heart. You must always remember that life is only just a struggle. As long as we still want to seek existence, to seek a happier existence, we must raise up our chests and work hard to keep going!

Although I have lost you, my heart will always ardently bless you.

Goodbye!

Xiang, send in

Jin Xiang lifts up a few thick pages of writing paper. Unable to stop the lashing of boiling emotions, his line of vision gradually moves beyond the edge of the paper and in the window he sees a distant clear and bright sky without a single shady cloud. So still, clear, crisp – boundless.

His thoughts are then thrown into that new place.

## Six

Sunday.

Jin Xiang lies on the bed, flipping through a new edition of *The Little Golden Calf*.<sup>7</sup> It is around nine o'clock when there is the sound of several light knocks on the door.

"Who is it? Come in!"

The person who walks in is Jin Xiang's old classmate Yang Naiqi.

"Ah! Lao Yang."

Jin Xiang holds Yang Naiqi's hand tightly and, facing the bed, lets him sit down.

"I heard that you came back yesterday. At the time, I didn't really believe it. Later, I asked Lao Tian on the phone, and he told me that you live here." Stating this thus far, he just sits down on the bed.

"How are things? Are you busy?"

"It's not busy, it's just a little chaotic but, Lao Jin, I see – how have you become so gaunt?" Yang Naiqi asks with concern.

"Oh! I don't think so," Jin Xiang touches his cheeks with his hands, "but, I should be slimmer. This journey of returning to my hometown, it was nothing but disappointment.

"Don't take things too seriously, don't you still live here now? Then you can forget everything that's not very relevant. Actually, it's good to plan and prepare for what's in front of you!"

"In front of me?" Jin Xiang looks coldly at the desktop, "It's already five days since I came back. I entrusted Lao Tian to give me introduction to some work, but to now there is still no news."

"Then what do you intend to do?"

"What can I do? Except for writing, there's just writing, I don't know how to do anything else!"

"Then..." Yang Naiqi mutters to himself in hesitation, "Everyone will think for you, there's always a way."

For two or three days, Jin Xiang is anxious about the question of his profession. He knows the importance of economics in life, especially when doing anything in a different place requires money. He has a little sum of money from home and savings from the past few years. Adding it up, if he supports himself as he is, he can only barely pay his living expenses for a short month, that's all. How to handle the future days? Jin Xiang feels the terror of no way to do it.

"I only rely on you to mediate for me." He says so low that it is almost inaudible.

For a moment, silence seals the small and narrow room.

"Lao Jin, how about we go for a walk?"

Jin Xiang nods without answering. Just like that, he puts on his straw hat and walks out with Yang Naiqi.

The street in summer days is a sweaty setting. A hawker shouts three cents a popsicle and the front of the cold food store's doorway is filled with a chaotic group of people, heatedly clamoring.

They walk on the near-noon street. Sweat wets through everyone's shirts, and suppresses everyone's words. They march forward, panting.

The park also shows unusually frequent human language and footsteps traversing the length and breadth of the green lawn. Under the sunlight, the tender grass sticks softly to the ground.

"Ah, the continental climate of the north country!" Yang Naiqi does not stop wiping away his sweat, it steams out from every pore. He is so tired that he cannot get a chance to catch his breath.

Walking along the street, yellow umbrellas and red umbrellas push the paces of young men and women. June seems to be an intoxicating season in the city, with hot thorns provoking fiery love affairs.

Facing this reality, Jin Xiang recalls again so many unbearable memories, letting those memories ravage his feelings. Ah, he still loves that glorious past.

"Hey! Look, isn't that Lao Tian?" Suddenly, Yang Naiqi, who walks in front, turns around and pushes Jin Xiang's arm.

"Oh! Lao Tian."

Approaching him, Jin Xiang holds Tian Xin's hand and Yang Naiqi also leans next to Tian Xin.

"Where are you going?"

"We're taking a walk, don't know where we're going." Yang Naiqi vies to be the first to answer.

"Let's go together! It's just right for the three of us to have a drink!" Tian does not wait for anyone to answer, as one hand pulls Jin Xiang to walk toward a nearby tavern.

"How can it be! There are so many job seekers in society, I'm such a dunce and have no extraordinary ability. Is it easy to find a bowl of food to eat?" His tone is depressed.

"Don't worry, I think professions are never a problem." Tian Xin sees the dishes being delivered. "Don't mention all that, let's have a good drink!"

The wine chokes down his throat, and Jin Xiang's face suddenly turns red. He feels that it was not at all like this before, but today he is unexpectedly dizzy after several cups in succession. He does not want to beg for mercy in front of his friends, but he already utterly nurses tipsy feelings.

"I forgot, Lao Jin, I just saw Bai Xueru in the department store. She asked about your present situation and lodgings. She doesn't appear to be cold to you at all!" After Tian Xin drinks a cup, he stretches forward his head and tells Jin Xiang, who sits across from him.

"Well, a woman again! The devil in life!" A glass of wine is drunk without hesitation.

Jin Xiang's head is addled. He just wants to close his eyes and sleep, to never wake again. The cup in front of his eyes magically changes into a woman's bright red lips, delicate and charming buds. Without fear, he swallows cup after cup. He does not remember his friends by his side.

Yang Naiqi and Tian Xin talk a few words, and slowly chew the cold glutinous rice. During the day, the tavern is silent without a trace of sound. An electric fan on the roof blows a refreshing cool breeze.

Walking out from there, Jin Xiang, swaying, leans on Yang Naiqi's shoulder and tightly closes his eyes. He is drunk. Tian Xin hires a horse-drawn carriage to run toward Jin Xiang's hotel.

When Jin Xiang wakes up, it is already dusk in the city. His head is too heavy to lift. Looking at the table, there is a brief note. Reluctantly, he struggles to take it and look. It is left by Lao Tian and Lao Yang, asking him to rest well for a few days and as soon as there is anything promising they will come and tell him.

He lays on the bed, looking out the window at nightfall's clouds burning red-dish-purple. Just for a short moment, they are murky grey. As the curtain of night falls, they all disappear.

After drinking, he easily recalls old wounds that never heal. He is so paralyzed that he dares not again anticipate the distant future. In the past, he wearied of, and abandoned, city life and now he cannot help but tire again. Even so, he has long lost the excitement and encouragement of the former days. If admitting to live for life, it may perhaps still have some kind of meaning to it, but if it can be said that there is no lack of hope in life, then he has fallen to a foolish fate.

For a long time, a long time, Jin Xiang gazes fixedly at the road ahead of him. Distracted, he cannot see the least spark to lead the way. He is stuck in this dark, futureless realm, he is like a senile simpleton. Unable to control the desolation in his heart, in the end he quietly weeps.

It is almost the first time in recent years that he has cried. He covers his head and lets tears soak the pillow. He wants to cry out: "Save me! This child who has lost his love, why do you insist on handing him the misfortune of life?"

A string of words chokes up, he weeps bitterly. Loathing and injustice fill his chest, his eyes gradually widen. He sees the shadow of life chasing him, he scratches with his hands, kicks with his feet, gyrating non-stop on the bed.

After a few minutes, he is exhausted again like a wild animal that has galloped. He falls asleep, starting high-pitched snoring.

In the night, dreams entangle him. A woman's pink smiling face, smooth skin, the fullness of her figure, all surge up, one after another. He is anesthetized by the teasing of flesh and lust, having a wanton indulgence.

When he wakes up, it is just midnight. Emptiness aggravates his exhaustion.

## Seven

Time forever flows away.

Another four days pass. Jin Xiang even more anxiously anticipates news from his friends. He thinks that as long as there is work, if he can pay living expenses, then, no matter what, he can do anything.

Several times he also thinks of sending grandmother a letter, which perhaps would not disappoint him; but whenever he picks up the pen, it is always the same, he puts it down. He knows the reality of life in the village because of the previous return, and he cannot be hardhearted enough to gain by a ploy a little of grandmother's small amount of savings. Since he cannot send money back, he should not ask for money from his family again.

Today, from early morning when the writing paper is spread there, Jin Xiang holds a pen in his hand, lost in the thought of writing the pent-up feelings in his heart to Li Shuang! However, to pour out the trivial pain in one's heart to others should be a cruel punishment to others, and it is downright demeaning to oneself! Then write to Hui Gu to send regards for preparations for the newlywed period! He really does not want to say again lies that he does not want to say. The pen is held with a deadly grip, it never presses close to the paper once.

Just before noon, Tian Xin gives him a phone call. On the phone, Jin Xiang does not wait for the other party to make inquiries, he just chimes in first: "How is it? Are things hopeful?"

"Of course, it is – and it can be done now."

"What? Now?" Jin Xiang's heart wants to jump out of his mouth.

"That's right! Right now. Listen, I'll tell you, things are somewhat inconsistent and unknown, but there is a proofreading position at the printing house, though the salary is paltry.

"What is the approximate amount?"

"Probably they can give forty *yuan*!"

"Forty *yuan*?" Jin Xiang feels slightly disappointed, "That's too little, not even enough for my expenses!"

"But, Lao Jin, now that there are more people than jobs, if a job comes up, who wouldn't stretch their neck to squeeze in? So, this 40 *yuan* will still do, as I keep saying on your behalf. I would say you should give in a little!" He says consolingly.

"Wouldn't it just carry on like this?"

"What kind of talk is this? During this time, we can still carry out activities as usual in other places! If we get a position with better pay than this, can't we still as before quit here?"

"..." Jin Xiang is hesitant, indecisive. He carefully reckons, what can forty *yuan* be used for? Just this rented room needs twenty *yuan* a month, he still has to eat, still has to wear clothes, miscellaneous expenses, and social appointments, there is no way it could be enough.

"Lao Jin! What? Hurry up, decide! I'm still waiting for a reply. As I say, you'd better try it first, and do something to relieve your loneliness too!"

"If so, well, I'll try it first and talk about it later."

"Then come immediately! I'm waiting for you in front of the Baisheng Printing Office on Nanda road."

"Okay, I'll come."

As Jin Xiang takes a rickshaw to get there, Tian Xin paces back and forth on the asphalt road in the shade of a tree.

"You're here, I've been so anxiously waiting. There are still so many candidates for the vacancy here! If you don't take the position, those guys would snatch the hat."

Jin Xiang responds with an emotionless smile. Then, Tian Xin leads him into the not so large-scale Baisheng Printing Office.

Things go very smoothly. After Tian Xin introduces the manager and supervisors, they all appear very satisfied with Jin Xiang's record of formal education, so they take him to the office to sit down at a free desk.

There are not even twenty people in the entire office. Some anemic faces look up and then bury their heads in work again. Jin Xiang's desk is in a corner of the room, from where the bustling street can be seen.

After the manager briefly explains the duties of the job, he says. "Then, Mr Jin, it is best for you to start work tomorrow! The salary can start today to show a little special treatment." When he speaks, it is with a dry sneer.

"Thank you. From now, if there is something I don't understand, please feel free to give advice and notify me."

"No worries, we are all family."

Jin Xiang is not at all reluctant to leave and withdraws with Tian Xin. In the afternoon, there are still four hours of work, so Tian Xin and Jin Xiang say their goodbyes at the intersection.

Walking in the scorching hot wind at the end of June, Jin Xiang's heart is crammed with cold feelings. His initial ardent expectations toward the unfolding of his new life have been lost. He does not know whether it is sorrow or joy that more confuses his ability to think, but he readily concurs. Just now, as he remembers the tiring proofreading work, his head feels slightly swollen and in pain.

He does not walk toward the hotel; he steps into a public bathhouse.

After sweating a few times, a burst of relaxation seeps through his body, and he subconsciously looks at his very large healthy body with blood circulating in a crimson torrent. He feels that he cannot be dejected. He remembers what a friend who went far away told him: "We come into this world to suffer."

He clenches his fist still with the strength of a young man. He thinks that he should believe in himself and not doubt anymore.

From the public bathhouse he walks again onto the street. A little hope is born in his heart. This hope continues to grow again and, in the sunlight on the street, Jin Xiang's face, for the first time in a few days, opens into a smile. He gets stronger.

After having dinner on the street, he walks to the hotel just at nightfall. As night lights begin to turn on, his face is covered with a flush from the wine.

Tonight, he carefully enjoys the sights of the stores' advertisements and colorful electronic accessories. He walks between two or three markets. He does not intend to buy anything, he just enjoys the sights of the night's luxury in a dissipated state of mind.

When he returns to the hotel it is then midnight, when he should be asleep. He pushes open the door and turns on the light. He finds a rectangular envelope on the table. He hurriedly picks it up. The handwriting makes him tremblingly open the seal and he reads a page of writing paper with green edging.

As he reads the letter, his expression resumes its usual melancholy expression, his eyebrows tightly wrinkle together, his gaze moves sluggishly on the paper, and he reads it over and over again.

In the end, it remains under his eyes. There are two lines of slender sentences attached beside that punctuate interest:

If you have still not forgotten your former days' youth and lover, do not be miserly and again permit me this miniscule request! Tomorrow at four o'clock in Yiqian Park, wait for me.

Jin Xiang cannot forget that lover who once buried a fiery love, and he cannot restrain his malice toward her being married to the rich gentry. Under these completely incongruous feelings, he cannot decide whether he should agree with the incoming letter's request.

This night, he suffers insomnia again.

The broadcast of musical compositions on the street, deep in the night, is distinctly transmitted to his hearing, making him sentimental. As melodious and tantalizing musical compositions dominate, his thoughts waver endlessly within the limits of a whirlpool of love.

"Am I indeed demanding love to warm my life?" He asks himself this and he answers in the affirmative: "Love of the opposite sex will enhance the progress of your career, and it can also tell you the beautiful meaning of life."

He gradually becomes blurry. When he is about to fall asleep, the vibration of hot bed linens and sugary cheerful talk transmit from next door. He comes clear out of the blur and reaches out his hands to cover his ears. Streetlights illuminate the pale grey ceiling.

Night, it is deep.

## Eight

Tomorrow.

Jin Xiang gets up very early. Although he is dizzy and dim-minded, incurred by not enough sleep, he endures the first day to start this job. He cannot be late or absent.



Hurriedly, he eats the deep-fried twisted dough sticks and soy milk he bought on the street corner. He then changes into a comparatively spotless white Western shirt and without stopping for a moment walks to Nanda Road.

On the early morning street, there is only office workers and students walking silently. For the most part, the peddlers have not come out yet. The iron doors of the mall are also tightly locked. This street that was bustling at night seems to be still reluctant to leave its sleep.

Jin Xiang walks along the road. Looking at a layer of thin haze in the distance, he feels a haze-like taint on the way of life. He unceasingly thinks about his working days in the government office before the return to his native place. What kind of society is this with its bad inheritance? Although it is a privately managed printing house this time, from an initial inspection, one can also spy how evil, sly and treacherous this narrow and small circle of people is. The most painful thing is to cope with insincerity. He wants to eliminate that coping, but there is no other way to go.

When he strides forward into the office, it is twenty minutes before eight o'clock, which surprises him – many of the people seen yesterday are sitting in their seats busy with their work.

He has not yet sat down when Mr. Manager coldly walks over.

"Always come earlier in the future."

"Doesn't work start here at eight o'clock?"

Hearing Jin Xiang's question, Mr. Manager's face smiles a very unnatural smile.

"If this were a large printing office, of course we would start work and stop work on schedule, but here cannot compare to other places. There are fewer people and more things to do, so come a bit early in the early morning, and at night you may as well lead the sun to return. Otherwise, you must even do it overnight, and endure unavoidable hardship. Mr. Jin, because it's your first time, maybe you don't know. Please come still earlier in the future!"

Half sneering, he finishes talking and walks away. Jin Xiang sits down sluggishly, only to see that the desktop already is heaping with two tall piles, with original manuscripts on one side, and first edition prints on the other side. The unexpected quantity discourages Jin Xiang.

When he thinks of life and looks back at those other busy people, he takes up a fountain pen with determination, and proofreads with red ink, staining one by one.

From nine o'clock until noon, he continues without stop. When the steam whistle blows, he takes a breath. Only about one third of the work in front of him is completed. The type is so irregular and slanting, the smell of the black printing ink pits him on the verge of vomiting, his head is even heavier.

Sometimes, he occasionally looks at pedestrians on the street. He envies their freedom to take a walk. However, work immediately recalls his eyesight, and he diligently compares, inspecting page by page.

The prints are full of vulgar romance novels. The disgusting content makes him want to stop working several times. He wonders about this kind of labor- and paper-consuming production, what kind of contribution or destruction does it have in moving forward the cultural world?

He reluctantly, painfully, continues to read. During this work, he only thinks about how he can quickly complete the work and how he can immediately run out for a few deep breaths.

At twenty minutes to four o'clock, in front of his eyes is so dizzy that he cannot clearly see the blurry words anymore. After putting in order the proofreading, he hands it to the manager and at the same time, he says the excuse that he does not feel well and will come early tomorrow morning to get the remaining work done.

Under Mr. Manager's cold expression, he walks out of the office's door. He is as happy at seeing the sky and sun again as a prisoner unchained. This happiness was formerly a sorrowful mood pent up with unspeakable depression, pulling his slow steps.

Jin Xiang feels that he has now indeed become a convict in the circle of life. To live, he exchanged his freedom and everything. Life itself is devoid of meaning, a hope-deadened body makes him lose faith in this work.

Walking through the park in front of the post office, suddenly he remembers the promise on last night's writing paper. In a certain kind of venting anger frame of mind, he walks past the white wooden fence and into the park with few sightseers.

Stepping onto the glossy emerald-green, short grass, from time to time he turns around to look back.

On a wooden chair by a path, Jin Xiang notices a fashionable woman sitting with her back to him.

As he approaches, he makes the sound of a light cough. It is precisely Bai Xueru who turns her face.

"Oh!" Jin Xiang is speechless – is this to talk about the long separation? Or to talk about feelings on parting? He cannot even think of it. He only stares at the face that has lost a lot of weight and yet is as beautiful as ever, with those two clear and transparent, moist black eyes. He feels a burst of heartbreak.

"Sit down! I knew you'd come. I've waited for some time." While speaking, she smiles charmingly at Jin Xiang.

He sits down on a wooden chair less than a foot away, in front of this is a pond. From time to time comes the sound of oars and the voices of people. There is a densely planted willow forest on the trail, blocking the casting of sightseers' line of vision.

"When did you come back from your hometown? Why didn't you even say a word to me when you left?" Bai Xueru strokes her light blue velvet gauze gown, lowers her head and asks, pondering thoughtfully.

"Life has conquered me." Jin Xiang moves his head toward the sky. The sun shines on his face through gaps in the forest's leaves. Spotlessly white clouds float in the sky, but his face is terribly gloomy.

"You should forgive me. You should also understand how painfully I am living. Ah, life, the life we longed for before, what of it has been given to us now?" Bai Xueru turns her face toward Jin Xiang. Shining eyes stare at him.

For the life of him, Jin Xiang cannot answer a question about life. He himself is also immersed in this puzzling whirlpool and cannot find a way that he should go.

"Everything of mine is now destroyed, but I hate to say that our love can also be destroyed! Xiang, can you understand?"

"You, you should take a look at your own status."

"No, you can't be so feudal too! I suffer hardships and I also want to live. I still have fiery emotions, I beg you to give me ever-lasting spiritual comfort, Xiang! Can't you give a satisfactory answer to this pitiful request from a fallen woman?"

For this complaining tearfully former lover, Jin Xiang cannot be cold to past sentiments that turned into the shadows of dreams. He sympathizes with her calamity. In a despondent frame of mind, he weaves again an empty knot of love.

"But, us, isn't it impossible?"

"No - they bought my youth, but they can't buy my freedom, Xiang! I think you may not have a happier life now, so what are we still holding back for?" Bai Xueru nestles up against Jin Xiang's side and, as is her habit, puts her hand on Jin Xiang's shoulder.

"Xueru, can we still really love each other? I always feel like there is a dark shadow pressing down. It takes my breath away."

"Then, can't we struggle? And what is destiny? Let's fight hard while aging has still not come!" In front of Jin Xiang, Bai Xueru is young again. He smells the perfume flowing from the woman's body, forgets the toil of the working hours, forgets how far apart the social divide his relationship with her is.

"If we can be allowed to live happily again, Xueru, how I would look forward to it." He completely surrenders.

"Xiang, you should believe that love is a kind of force."

How thin and brittle the hearts of young people are! And is all forgotten after a short goodbye? During this period, the unfortunate vicissitudes of life easily linked together.

At the end of June, the wind cannot blow the water of the lotus-covered pond.

It is late night in the city. Jin Xiang takes Bai Xueru by the hand and walks out of the restaurant of a third-rate building, and they jump into a new-style automotive vehicle.

The car transporting them speeds ahead on a smooth road. Tonight, Bai Xueru is slightly drunk. When the servant brings in wine bottles one after another, Jin Xiang is astounded by her drinking capacity.

"Don't get drunk!"

"Drink, wine - only wine can tell me what a silent corpse life is."

Under the lamp, Bai Xueru lures Jin Xiang's greedy line of vision, a flowery smile blooms on a frozen to death field of ice.

After Bai Xueru pays, until she lies in the body of the car, Jin Xiang frequently watches Bai Xueru attentively, and feels that her personality is changing very fast. She has already abandoned her gentle and soft demeanor. Actually, she is close to boorishly negating it all.

"What're you thinking about? Don't let silence seal the door to your heart." Bai Xueru opens her eyes and low, hanging from the corner of her mouth, is a bitter autumn smile

"I think you've changed!" Jin Xiang finally said.

“Yes, I’ve changed. But my heart still beats non-stop with youthful tides of blood. Xiang, people who don’t understand drunkenness can’t understand life.”

Lifting his head, the whole sky is full of stars but it appears pale and faint due to the intensity of the streetlamp lights.

The vehicle, abiding Bai Xueru’s instructions, first stops in front of the door of Jin Xiang’s hotel. Jin Xiang’s hand is tightly grasped by those soft and smooth fingers, then a stack of hard banknotes is stuffed in.

“Take it and use it! The person being the guest should always pay attention to their body. I’ll call you again in a few days.”

Jin Xiang gratefully watches the car go into the distance. Left with a bit of loneliness and distraction, he walks into his own room on the second floor.

He sits silently, leaning on the window. For a long time, for a long time, tears flow along his cheeks, into the corners of his lips.

## Nine

Jin Xiang has become a mad lover of the night.

Bai Xueru wants him to come out for a date once a week. They roam dance halls, watch movies, explore parks, there are endless pleasures for them in the city and, every time they part, there is always a stack of hard banknotes stuffed into Jin Xiang’s pockets or hands. He often thinks that to spend a woman’s money obtained from selling herself is such a dishonorable thing! But every time when he resolves to refuse, Bai Xueru always presses Jin Xiang’s hand: “Take it to spend! We live in this economic life circle and can no longer escape utilizing money.”

Therefore, although Jin Xiang has still not received any salary, his life has not suffered any material distress at all and is so well-off that he is in and out of high-class public places of entertainment.

Like this, he lives a life of two extremes, the daytime work exhausts him and with tobacco and alcohol at night, the woman again entangles him. Finally, one afternoon in early July, he falls ill on the way back to the hotel.

He passes two days in a completely muddle-headed state, imperceptive to everything. As if awakening from sleep, he perceives that he lies on a sick bed in a small room, the charcoal-white walls and white pillow and mattress irritate his vision. Exhausted again, he sleeps.

Like this, waking at times, sleeping at times, the dog days of summer pass. As he awakens anew, the Chinese parasol tree outside the window already shows the new yellow of early autumn. Strengthless, he sits up. Looking at the stack of mail put on the table, there are condolence letters from Tian Xin and Yang Naiqi, there are postcards sent to the hotel from Li Shuang, only he does not see messages sent from Bai Xueru. Lonely, he frowns. The activities of his mind spread out like the sky: He cherishes the memory of his aged grandmother in his hometown, he worries about some friends who are concerned about him, he frets about work left unfinished, but he lies on a sick bed, unable to move at all. Quietly listening to the vibrations of breath and blood, it feels as still as a desert.

On the diagnostic diary is written: “Neurasthenia.”

Jin Xiang once said to the doctor: "I do not have a mental disorder at all! I'm just a little tired, I'm going back – I'll be fine if I rest."

The doctor always shakes his head gloomily. "You still require treatment, your source of disease is very deep."

Jin Xiang scratches his hair, counting the calendar, observing the shadows of the seasons on the Chinese parasol tree, listening to the sounds of life outside.

"Get stronger... my friend."

That life and work, the toil and exhaustion, all lure him. He thinks: Without health, there is no freedom, no life.

Life is a swindler that steals youth. Hurriedly, in an instant, autumn takes the place of the dog days of summer, and the leaves of the Chinese parasol tree in front of the window fade and fall.

In the early morning, just as he sits up on the bed, the door opens. A familiar face comes forward, always so delicately covered with a layer of blushing.

"Sir, would you like some congee?"

The mention of congee gives Jin Xiang a headache; it is like that. Thin white rice congee with two small pieces of pickles added, he is tired of eating it. Especially when he gradually became stronger after the illness, he feels the force of his appetite.

"Isn't it good to give some food to eat? A little bit is good, smart Miss!"

At the last sentence, a clever smile is thrown on her blushing face, and she quietly closes the door. This day's dinner, Jin Xiang and the nurse eat together.

When she came, she carried the portions of food she should – it is a plate of shredded pork and painted tofu pieces, and a bowl of plain chicken-egg cakes. Jin Xiang eats very happily and, without the doctor's permission, eats half a bowl of rice more. When he randomly lifts his head, he sees a face calmly pondering something, slowly chewing the food in her mouth.

By the end of the meal, the two of them almost barely speak. After the meal, Jin Xiang writes a few lines to Bai Xueru. He wants to go to sleep like he does every day, but he cannot. On his nearly month-long deathly still mind, there are a few slight waves again.

In this night's dream he sees Hui Gu. Scared, a new impulse awakes him with a start. Hui Gu is still simple, possessing the beauty of a country lass. Jin Xiang thinks of Hui Gu, it is as if he were also young and so very innocent.

He regrets it – he should not have cowardly refused Hui Gu's wish. If two people escape far away, to seek a happy simple life, he thinks he would always be happier than he is now. In that instant, everything is resolved, everything is buried.

When his thoughts overflow, he often wants to cry but tears cannot flow according to his consciousness. He can only be immersed in speechless silence, mourning past events that will never return.

As the noon whistle rings, the nurse, as is her usual practice, quietly pushes open the door.

While checking his temperature, she smiles compassionately.

"Mr. Jin, do you feel better today?"

"Thank you, much better."

"These few days, in your dreams you often call some women's names. No wonder you suffer mental illness!"

"But I didn't know, but, unlikely!" Jin Xiang tries his best to calm himself, his face gazes far away outside the window.

"Young people can't always avoid this kind of entanglement. Happiness is only temporary, but pain may be everlasting." As he speaks, his face becomes cold, without a trace of sunshine or warmth.

At the sound of the door, the white corner of a garment is pulled out of the small room again.

Jin Xiang bows down beside the window, looking into the distance at the air pollution of the city and the bald tops of the uneven buildings, as if he is so alienated. On a nearby emerald-green, tender lawn walk human shadows of many different bodies. He thinks that he should strongly walk out. A few days will bring about the north country's winter, which will stiffen a fragile life with cold and, moreover, he cannot stay outside for a long time. He longs for the warmth of his native place and an easy and comfortable life.

It is not yet three o'clock when the nurse tells Jin Xiang that a female guest had just then come to search for him. After knowing that he is here, she boarded a car again and left. Before leaving, she exhorted her not to tell him that someone had come, because sooner or later she will come again to see him.

Jin Xiang feels an impossible to explain indignation and resentment. He understands that there must be someone monitoring Bai Xueru's actions and cannot let him and her meet face to face. He detests the existence of this hidden force, even to the point of letting him curse its destruction, the grand resolution of all approaches.

Just in a flash, that beautiful face repeatedly gives a kind of warm and clear memory. From the nurse's brow, he sees the past's girlhood Hui Gu. This is what he has been questioning for many days, and only now has just been clearly identified.

"Your body is about to rest. I think this sudden visitor will have no benefit for you."

"But the sins of life don't forgive the sick."

When the silent staring without speaking arrives, it is only a dialogue of souls that can comfort the lonesomeness of the ill and the aberrant.

Time slips off the Chinese parasol tree's leaves.

## Ten

Nightfall, again.

As before, sunlight seems to love the earth. A slice of golden-yellow radiance brushes the white second-floor window but, after all, this love is only for a moment. Slowly indifferent, it sinks under the horizon like a deep sigh.

In the night, streaks of light bearing colored flames project from the window of the building. The building is like a huge wild animal, flashing ferocious glittering eyes. The gathering darkness shakingly recoils.

Jin Xiang paces back from the balcony and lies on the bed quietly looking out the window. Every trivial deed crawls into his memory, making him have no alternative but to close his eyes and ponder deeply.

Yesterday, Jin Xiang waited until deep in the night but Bai Xueru did not come to see about his illness. Disappointment rouses Jin Xiang to action. In the morning, two letters are sent out in succession: one for Li Shuang and one for Tian Xin, requesting them to think of a way for him. He determines to not allow Bai Xueru to pay for the medical treatment expenses again. He thinks that requests to a woman should never be for economic support!

When he is thinking about things, gradually lethargically half-asleep, suddenly he opens his eyes to the sound of the door opening and closing.

"Ah! Mr. Jin hasn't slept yet?" The nurse harbors a smile and approaches the side of Jin Xiang's bed and sits down on the chair.

"I don't want to sleep yet. I'm counting – how many days still until I can get better?" Jin Xiang lays as before, covered with a spotlessly white quilt with cotton wadding.

"Mr. Jin, I really must trouble you. Can you tell me a way that I should go from here? Then how grateful I'll be to you!"

"Isn't your life very stressful right now? Can you still do more work at the same time? Other than your daytime employment?"

"No, I'm disgusted by the idleness of this job. I can't be hard-hearted enough to watch the years bury me. I think I should take advantage of being young, to do more things that I can do, even though my physical strength is so weak."

As Jin Xiang listens attentively, his shame grows.

"I don't have a family, there's nothing, I'm just a lonesome child. I allow myself to arrange life as I please, to exploit life." The shy-red face is desolate, as if it is not the same person with the smile of the past. "I've abandoned everything. I keep moving forward, but what is work? It can't give me an appropriate price. The more I move, the more I feel the terror and coercion of darkness. So, I repudiate this path. I think I should open up my new lifeline."

Looking at her resolute expression, Jin Xiang replies with a friendly attitude: "I sympathize with you, but I'm the same too, I can't find a way to go! Excuse me for not being able to give you a satisfactory answer. Let's all get healthy, take on the work we should do, and give up the games that destroy enthusiasm!"

"That's too abstract, I don't understand. Why are you giving me such a vague answer?" Under the lamp, long eyelashes conceal her eyes.

Jin Xiang's heart is very hot. He tries his best to restrain it, because he cannot easily show his love and this woman is again stubbornly, tightly pressing toward him, making him pace back and forth. He is unable to dodge and unable to face her.

"Paths, each should have their own to go on. People with willpower will be unlikely to feel terrified or lonely." After this disconnected line of discussion is spoken, Jin Xiang dejectedly hangs down his head as strict reason rebukes him.

Habitual reticence silences the two people's mouths again.

A light knock on the door sounds. Then from outside walks in the woman who has been entangled in Jin Xiang's nostalgic memory for a long time. The woman suddenly stops her steps as she feels slightly stunned that a nurse sits in front of the bed.

"Is Mr. Jin here?"

"Oh, Xueru!" Jin Xiang sits up on the bed, watching the nurse walk out and close the door. "Please sit here!"

Bai Xueru sits down awkwardly. Anxiety covers up the unpleasant emotions she brings along. Slightly slowly gasping for breath, she casts her eyes around the facilities in the room.

"Are you feeling better these days?"

"Thank you, I will likely leave the hospital soon."

"I heard from the hotel that you are sick, recuperating here. At first, I intended to immediately come to see you but, in the end, I couldn't get it done." Bai Xueru seems to have hereditary melancholy, she is sad, recounting her own suffering, of which she has too much to tell.

Jin Xiang cannot find a word of comfort among the lies that he cannot bear to bring to deceive a faithful woman who had loved, and continues to love, him. He trembles for the unfortunate fate of people. Does struggle really fail to give them their desired fruit?

Lamplight keeps dim the corners of the ward.

"The past has left us forever."

A lithe and graceful spark reappears in front of Bai Xueru's eyes. She seems to have grasped a precious memory. In the end, that cherished grip was silently stolen by the years.

"I thought, Xiang, we would never have a future, even though that future continually tempts us. One day, nursing tears, we will finally bury it with our own hands."

"To say it like that, aren't we finished?"

"Life is too devoid of meaning. We are exceedingly negligible in the mighty torrent of society. We trample on each other all the day through, in devastated days. What else can we say about hopeful ideals? Just allow me to live one day, just let the laughing, tearful face live!" Bai Xueru leans against the side of the table in front of the window, looks down at the street, turns her head again and strokes the flower bouquet in the bottle.

"The shackles of life have caused us to suffer badly!"

"Xueru, can't I be brave enough to discard the shackles of the devil's hand? Maybe life won't betray us. "

Bai Xueru looks at Jin Xiang's full of radiance eyes. She feels that enthusiastic people are fools.

"No, you can't request this of me, we are people who can't be joined in wedlock."

A moment of silence passes.

"I also once thought, you should find one like you, marry a courageous woman, and then create your ideal life. I am decrepit, like a weed that has passed through a frost, the cold congealed its tissues. What other needs for happiness and hope can it have? However, a few times, I wasn't willing to let you go, this was not at all to entrap your youth. Because I lost you, I lost the courage to live my life! Last night, I thought about it carefully again. For you, I'd better sacrifice myself! Sooner or later, this faded love will be cast aside."



Bai Xueru sits at the bedside and listens attentively to Jin Xiang's utterance after a long silence. "You can't think like that. I want to pledge that my love for you is the same as before. I understand you more than I understand myself. We should use our spirits to encourage and reward each other, until the day we both quietly die."

Gratefully, Bai Xueru grasps Jin Xiang's two hands as they exchange pathetic tears from their hearts. Such an ever-gloomy configuration!

Jin Xiang looks at the clock hands on the table. Night gradually deepens.

"You should go back, visits at night are never allowed here and you've stayed for so long."

"The hospital, I've already spoken with them. I'll go back now. The bills for medical treatment and all expenses for these days have been paid. I'll come to see you again in a few days."

Bai Xueru stands up and smooths her dress. Jin Xiang opens his mouth but cannot say a word.

"Don't bother, just take care and you'll be fine."

The door closes again, and the silhouette of the woman who had been detained for so long disappears again. Jin Xiang, lacking strength, lays down and closes his eyes. He cannot fall asleep immediately and tosses about.

As he is about to fall asleep, the nurse comes again.

"Will you drink milk tomorrow morning? Or thin congee?"

"Milk!" Fed up, he adds a sentence. "Anything is fine..."

"Today the doctor said that if your sickness does not develop an unusual condition, you can leave the hospital next week."

"Oh!" He opens his eyes, pleasantly surprised. "Really? I can leave the hospital next week?"

Unexpectedly this time, the nurse does not answer him at all. Looking at Jin Xiang's expression, with a bit of disappointment she withdraws out the door.

Jin Xiang very clearly hears a series of hurried footsteps sounds, far to the other end of the duty room.

Night, the ward returns to quiet.

## Eleven

On an early morning at the start of autumn, when the blades of grass are dyed with silvery white frost flowers, Jin Xiang walks out of the hospital.

He gazes at the hospital ward left behind him, counting the two months of painful days that disappeared here. He feels sorrowful for his partiality to the painful past.

Walking on the path, he says neither a word of nostalgia or gratitude. At this moment, his emotions are complicatedly interlocked, and he does not know whether it is joy or sentimentality driving all his feelings. Throughout the end of this parting, he does not say a word.

Jin Xiang walks into the carriage car and reclines. From its very thick glass windows to the windows of the hospital ward that is worth being remembered by many thousands of people, he sees the blushing nurse standing in front of the door's foundation stones. He promptly pushes open the car door again.

"Thank you for your thoughtful care."

The other party only gracefully nods. The body of the car sways a little and without hesitation speeds out of the street corner, and rushes toward the hotel at the farthest point of sight on the bustling street.

Jin Xiang still remembers the previous summer's store window decorations, but now they have long been changed to an autumn extravagance, lavishly made up, which makes him feel that time truly is like a river, and that seasons are very quickly completely consumed, again sending people on the journey to old age.

In a mirror opposite the car seat, he sees his thin, lean face, accompanying both of his very deep cheeks, so pale that there is no rosy complexion. This illness eroded his health. He contemplates that he will not recover anytime soon.

He weakly strides forward again into the threshold of the hotel.

Returning after the illness, his whereabouts are locked up by the hotel. Sometimes he wants to go out or go to visit the printing office but, in the end, he sits out of breath in front of the window again, bathing in the autumn sunshine.

Quite a few days pass and Jin Xiang gradually strengthens.

Following his increase in appetite, his complexion turns slightly rosy. Every daytime, except for naps, he reads books or magazines, occasionally he tidies up utensils in the room. One chilly early morning, just as Jin Xiang is wiping off the table, Li Shuang pushes the door open and walks in.

"Lao Li, when did you come?" Jin Xiang puts aside the thing in his hand, and warmly grasps Li Shuang's hand. Li Shuang then sits down in front of the bed.

"Oh, Lao Jin, aren't you doing well recently? How come it's like this?" Li Shuang begins to notice Jin Xiang's complexion.

"Yes, I just left the hospital the day before yesterday."

"What illness did you contract?"

"What else? Tiring work, melancholy feelings, an excessive waste of body and spirit. They are the causes of neurasthenia. I'm a patient who contracted neurasthenia!"

"It's all because you are too dispirited. People who are at a place other than where they live should pay special attention to their own health. Damaged health can kill your courage to keep living."

"I myself very well know a person's struggle to survive, it requires hard work and taking risks. However, I failed. I dedicated all my concentrated blood and strength to work. I also saw many people walking on a road to alleviate the use of such blood and strength. That way has its promise and all, but it only threw me into a boundless dark desert – how could I still continue with my work? So, on the one hand I was coping with my career, and on the other I was chasing the pleasures of life. Day and night were equally exhausting. One day, I couldn't struggle anymore and fell ill."

Li Shuang listens attentively to Jin Xiang's words, and silently sees people fighting a flood in the stream of life. What a pitiful destiny. This fateful movement has not for a moment relaxed its firm grip on the spring in Xiang's life, imbuing his happy days with ever-lasting suffering.

"Now, I only desire that you get healthy as soon as possible. A setback or two are nothing. As long as we have faith, we have courage, the promise is present, right before our eyes. We just have to use our hands to touch it."

Jin Xiang has some misgivings about Li Shuang's words. He has tried it with wise and experienced hands, and the present and the past are the same, full of hollowness and deathly silence. "Yes, I need to restore my health as soon as possible, but how to manage again in the days to come?"

Li Shuang thought about it for a long time. He cannot immediately answer this question. He wants to say: Those who have the power to live can just live. He feels that is exceedingly abstract and devoid of meaning. What about confirming it in a practical and tangible way? The roads arranged in front of Jin Xiang are all dead ends.

"As long as you recover your former days' health, things do not have the right to forever abandon or refuse us." This conclusion cannot be counted as a conclusion, but it interrupts a long and far-flung conversation.

"Well, I'm going to call for food, I think you haven't eaten yet!"

"Don't bother, you just have something."

When Jin Xiang returns, behind follows a few dishes and two bowls of noodles sent over. The two of them then have breakfast on opposite sides of the table.

Jin Xiang's appetite is almost the same as Li Shuang's. Just when they finish eating, he calls someone to remove the dishes. Jin Xiang slightly wipes residual drips from the table. The two start to chat.

"The last time I received your letter, I was very moved. I thoroughly understand that slogans and condolences cannot save reality, so I didn't hesitate to send the person you saw that time to a public school as a teacher. I will shoulder her insufficient living expenses. At the same time, she seems to be repenting her past life, and quietened her career. Recently, she is completely cut off from the life you saw then. She says: 'Let the past be buried! From now on, I want to live faithfully.' Do you think that this woman's regeneration is because she did not kill her courage to fight hard for life?"

Golden shadows of the sun spread across Li Shuang's narrow forehead, detaining Jin Xiang's line of vision.

"Did you really do this? I wish future happiness for you both."

"Actually, according to my original plan, I intended to find another man for her to marry. Recently, we both feel spurred on by the circumstances of our lives. We can't break up because only she can inspire my enthusiasm, and only I can tell her the inevitably narrow path of life. If the fate of the world no longer tyrannizes us, there may be a wedding held this year."

"I'll do anything that I can, I'll certainly hurry back to attend your wedding." Jin Xiang can never avoid his feelings of loathing for that woman's past. Likewise, he does not dare to have complete confidence in Li Shuang's words.

"Her past, I don't want to severely criticize her again. Who hasn't made mistakes? Don't let mistakes create a lifetime of misfortune. Since that day of her regeneration, she sincerely made an oath, in front of my eyes she once bitterly cried. I only said to her: 'I wish you a good life.'"

Perhaps Jin Xiang's disappointment makes him so lazy as to not listen very closely to his own narration. Dazed, he draws lines vertically and horizontally on the tabletop, exploring the road ahead of him. At dusk, he feels hesitatingly at a loss.

"Our affairs are just like this. The situation in the village is still covered everywhere with an increasingly degenerate atmosphere. This time I have come here, on the one hand it is for a little thing at school and, on the other hand, it is to come see you. Two days ago, I met your grandmother. She pleaded with me to bring a message to you that it will be good for you to go back soon. Grandmother is getting older, and it's always good to have someone by one's side to tend overnight."

"Thank you, I'll go back to visit in a few days when I'm getting stronger. Home, I've forgotten it for a long time!" Jin Xiang thinks of grandmother, which disturbs his calmed long-standing travel worries.

"Then, I'll go now. We can talk when I return this evening. I will board the vehicle early tomorrow morning," Li Shuang obstructs Jin Xiang's steps and walks out the door of the hotel.

Jin Xiang is at the window again, quietly looking at the hustle and bustle of cars, horses, and people on the street. The whole day disappears in contemplation by the window.

In the evening, when Li Shuang returns to the hotel, Jin Xiang just silently faces the dining table full of dinner. After greetings, the two people have occasional questions and answers. Without words, they eat a sumptuous dinner.

This evening, Li Shuang and Jin Xiang share the bed. Li Shuang even asks if the medical expenses have still not been settled. Jin Xiang only answers that they have been paid and is asked again – who paid? No sound is made.

They pass the evening, and for Li Shuang to rush for the first vehicle, the two both get up early, busily wash dishes and eat. Jin Xiang is much more energetic than yesterday.

Jin Xiang walks out the hotel's door onto the street, intending to see Li Shuang off to the motor vehicle company, but Li Shuang refuses with tactful words over and over again.

"When can we meet again?" Jin Xiang asks sadly.

"Just return in a few days when you feel better! Always keep your emotions in check." Li Shuang shakes Jin Xiang's hand.

A thin layer of fresh and cool dew shadows hides Li Shuang's silhouette. Distraction for no reason covers Jin Xiang. He walks into the narrow and small room and his field of vision encounters a small tube-envelope placed on the head of the small bed. Inside is a stack of banknotes, on top is attached a strip of paper with a scrawled note:

My friend, quietly recuperate! I leave you this little pocket money. When you don't have enough, write again to tell me.

Shuang, left words.

The characters on the banknotes expand exponentially in Jin Xiang's eyes, his lips twitch, as if to laugh, but tears rapidly flow down.

He moves in front of the window. The dew mist has already receded, he can no longer see traces of pedestrians.

## Twelve

As soon as he opens his eyes, Jin Xiang hears the voice of a servant call him from outside the door.

He just about uses the "quickest speed" to put on his coat and rush to the telephone room downstairs.

"Hey! Where is it!... Ah! Is it Xueru? What's the matter? Eh?... Ah!... Ah!... Okay! Certainly... But you!..."

Before he can speak again, the receiver there is already put down. Despondent, Jin Xiang walks back to his room and lays down again.

He wonders: Why is Bai Xueru's tone so panic-stricken? Furthermore, there is no news these days, and why did she not wait to hear his words and just flatly put down the receiver?

He is afraid. Shadows seem to cover his head. A nightmare shocks him, the nightmare that he constantly guarded against before, and that will end his connections with the dying love.

Jin Xiang curls up in bed and he does not eat breakfast. He blindly gropes for suspicious phone calls and, furthermore, he does not close his eyes once. He remembers that time Bai Xueru visited in the hospital. Then he also remembers the blushing nurse. At last, his thoughts fall on the leaves of the Chinese parasol tree in front of the window. He reminisces: They should have fallen now without leaving a single piece, and how lonely the remaining withered branches should be!

His heart is as cold as autumn's fallen leaves.

One after another, the people around him abandon him. On this solitary journey, there is only one person who will always make the lonely trek!

This habitual solitariness can make the sensitive strings of his heart sob when he is lonely. He picks up a magazine and without turning a page throws it onto the table. He tosses, constantly turning over on the bed, whiling away the cursed daytime.

At five o'clock, Jin Xiang randomly eats some snacks, drapes a cotton coat over his shoulders, turns several circles in the room, then just walks out the hotel's door and steps into a rickshaw.

The park in autumn is not as flourishing and exquisite as in the summer when Jin Xiang came. The trail is covered with a layer of yellow, orange, and pale green fallen leaves, lying there quietly, allowing people to trample them. The very green, emerald leaves have all been ended by autumn.

The season gives a lonely and depressing heart again, coating everywhere with a layer of sorrow. Jin Xiang looks at the calm pond water and coldly shivers.

Reclining on a wooden chair, he looks at the few tourists, all hurrying here and hurrying there. This autumn park bleakly rejects the tourists' footsteps, there is only Jin Xiang languidly lying on a wooden chair, looking at the sky.

After a while, Jin Xiang feels someone approach next to him and he stands up rapidly. It is exactly Bai Xueru standing beside the chair.

"Be careful of catching a cold!" She coldly casts her eyes to the ground as she speaks.

"I won't. Why haven't you sent me any news these few days?" Jin Xiang walks closer two feet and, feeling aggrieved, he asks these few words that he always wants to ask.

"Let's walk over there!"

Jin Xiang and Bai Xueru walk on a path in the deep and quiet forest. Bai Xueru never even raises her head, counting the sounds of stepping on the sandy road.

"It's time for us to break up." Haltingly, it took a long time to say such a sentence, as if talking to herself.

Jin Xiang suspects that he heard wrong and in return he asks rapidly, convulsively. "What?"

"I'm saying that this pitiful love life can't continue any longer." This time, Bai Xueru raises her eyes brimming with tears and, strengthless, she sits down on a stone bench beside the road, rubbing a corner of her velvet robe.

"It's you who is disgusted with me! Xueru."

"No, I will never reject the fountainhead of my life, it is them – the social relations who I hate have broken us up with an irresistible force."

"Tell me in detail! How are things going?" Jin Xiang rubs his hands together in anxiety.

"Because I have spent too much money, they have basically become aware of our relationship, so recently they want to take me out of here, to the mining area in the far north. What a desolate, cold and remote place. Oh! I said that I can't go, and they won't change their original plan. The day after tomorrow, I'll part from this city and you, forever. Xiang, what can be done about this? We live under the control of others. I also thought about a risky escape, but it would be impossible in the end, so we have to part, so as not to hurt you and hurt me."

Unable to hold back her pent-up emotions anymore, Bai Xueru simply falls into Jin Xiang's arms, sobbing recklessly.

"I can't watch you go, Xueru! Didn't you say that we should bravely fight hard? Don't cry, do you see that I have no tears? Xueru!" Jin Xiang lifts her tear-washed face, takes out a handkerchief and wipes it for her. Falling autumn leaves fly onto her hair.

"That's too dangerous, Xiang. Forgive me, it's all for you that I'm now firmly saying goodbye to you!"

"No, survival is a hard fight. Think, you and I can go back to my hometown. There I have a home and cultivated field, that simple life is so beautiful! Xueru, let's escape the city's confinement!"

Listening to Jin Xiang's determined plan, Bai Xueru conjectures and thinks for a long time, as if to quieten the climax of the emotional eruption and make a rational judgment about reality.

"Then, can I be your wife?"

"Xueru, why are you doubting me now? Our life will be so free and happy."

"Besides, are you able to stand the hard work of a farmer?"

"Of course, I think, aren't I very strong? If you don't leave me, labour is nothing but an easy and comfortable life can no longer be among our ideals." Jin Xiang tightly grasps Bai Xueru's hand, "Promise! We should have a few happy days."

"Then when would we go?"

"Tomorrow at noon! You can use as an excuse to go to the street to buy some needed things. Go directly to the out-of-town motor vehicle dealership, I'll wait for you there."

"Then, we'll be out of their palms!"

Bai Xueru is like in a dream, she looks at the sky and looks at Jin Xiang beside her, with two eyes staring blankly.

"Yes, at that time we'll really be free. Xueru, have you dreamt of that free life?"

"Oh, I think, isn't that life already approaching us?"

Jin Xiang sweeps away all the hazy memories in his heart. Facing Bai Xueru, showing a smiling expression, daydream-thinking of the future's free and happy days, he cannot help but heap a smile on his cheeks.

On the path, there is not the sound of a single person. He talks with her for a long time as the city is again completely enveloped in an evening mist. Facing the cool evening wind, they walk out of the park. Each steps into a rickshaw.

At the crossroads, Jin Xiang waves his hand.

"Don't forget! Tomorrow at noon!"

Bai Xueru drops a nod and a clever smiling face, turns onto another street and vanishes.

In the rickshaw, Jin Xiang greedily looks afar at every building in the city. He thinks: Tomorrow I will leave and I will never return.

### Thirteen

Last night, Jin Xiang did not sleep for almost the whole night.

On the one hand, as he puts his books and scattered utensils in order, great joy drives out sleep. He thinks this night about plans for leaving the city and determines his and Bai Xueru's way of life – and the preparations he should make. So, he adds up the countryside income and the consumption of a household of three. Whenever he finishes calculating something, he always smiles with satisfaction. Under the lamp, his lithe and graceful illusions start to float lively.

The sky just brightened and people in the hotel are still enamoured by the comfort of dreams as Jin Xiang washes his face, does some early morning things, and runs to the street corner to buy some soy milk and deep-fried twisted dough sticks. After everything is eaten, the city finally starts to wriggle awkwardly, the sun is also on the window curtain.

There is no need to be busy anymore. He sits panting on the bed covered with straw bags, quietly waiting for the noon departure.

It is not yet ten o'clock when Jin Xiang hires a horse-drawn carriage to transport a package now, as a hotel servant hurriedly hands him a letter. One side explains.

Jin Xiang looks at the letter's date stamp. It was sent last night. The slender handwriting makes his hands start to tremble as he leans beside the door and turns page after page...

Xiang, my love.

Forgive me for this last request! Please do not hate me. I actually left here at eleven o'clock tonight. According to their plan, originally it was to go tomorrow, but to avoid facing you, I indeed left together with the loathsome crowd while you slept.

Up to now, I still dare to unyieldingly say a sentence – I have truly loved you and continue to. However, life does not permit us to live happily together, fate has long predestined our pitiful separation!

I still remember your resolute expression yesterday. I hope you will always live with such fortitude! But I cannot carry out a fight with life like you do. Although my age proves that I still linger in the realm of youth, I have indeed dispelled all the qualifications that youths possess, and I sigh in vain at the decline of my youth.

It is not at all that I have purposefully deceived you, it is that in the vehicle on the way home I saw a lot of animated youths' shadows and I understood that I already can no longer be your partner. That is, I cannot, as you do, wish to seek a life together. You know, I am different from the time before when you were loving and courting me. I lost a lot of things, sometimes I even denied myself. Remember you said that I have changed. Yes, I reply to you with a sentence: I really have changed.

Now I cannot separate myself from my habitual material enjoyment, I am not used to the life of destitute peasant families. I need luxurious clothes, sweet and refreshing food, and every extravagant enjoyment. But I ask, can we go to the village to seek such requirements?

Do not be angry, it is not at all that I take pride in the city's harmful life. I have been deeply poisoned. Before, people were forcing me to settle for a life I was not used to, but now I cannot separate myself from it. The venom that life administered to me is also a pleasure. Xiang, I am such a useless corpse, how can you be depressed for losing it again!"

I have thought about it, I have thought about it over and over again. I should hurry to leave you, to let you seek the start of your new life without concerns. Otherwise, if I continued to give you a low-temperature love, you would be old and withered like me! Then what kind of poisonous snake or scorpion will people allege me to be? Or something more poisonous than snakes and scorpions! So, I have to go.

However, when I write you, the thought of leaving forever gives me infinite sadness again. How bleak is the parting forever of two hearts that love each other!

I am gone. I leave behind exhaustingly onerous memories and I walk away. I feel the perseverance of fate in front of my eyes before the arrival of a big resolution. Xiang, what do I have? Everything is over.

I will cherish the love that you gave me until I lose my life and die. Xiang, bless you.

The attached check, use it for travel expenses. Return to the countryside! You must think fondly of your family in the countryside. You cannot just drift around on your own.

And then on

The letter falls from Xiang's hands! The servant picks it up for him and presses it under the envelope. "What? Rest a while!"



"Over, everything is over." Jin Xiang sighs like an old man and turns to the driver again, "Bring me back the bag, I'm not going."

Only he himself is left in the room, accompanied by two bundled packages. He hangs his head in depression after suffering this unexpected upset. He picks up the writing paper again and reads it in sequence. Before he reads one side, next is a knock on the door, and Tian Xin and Yang Naiqi walk in side by side.

"Ah? Do you want to leave?" Astounded by the situation in the room, the visitors display astonished eyes.

Jin Xiang does not reply at all immediately. He first presses their shoulders so that they sit on the bed, he stuffs the letter into their hands, walks to the window and stands there for a long time.

The early morning of the cool and bright day is now overcast with blackening dark clouds. From time to time, chilly drizzle hits the glass, drawing vertical and horizontal lines. Pedestrians on the street walk lonely urgent steps. Only at this moment today does he feel that it is deep autumn.

"Is this just because a woman left?" Tian Xin reads the letter and asks with a sneer.

"She shrewdly rejected me and duped me too. Only now do I understand how unpredictable an enigma a woman's heart is." Jin Xiang turns his face away, and resolutely and loathingly denies Bai Xueru's love for him.

"In my opinion, this thing called love is not fun after all. It is vexing when it can't be gained, emptiness again when lost. Moreover, when a man is in the process of working hard on his career, this is a kind of inexplicable obstruction." Yang Naiqi's tone does not once attract Jin Xiang's attention and Tian Xin, who sits beside him, could not that suddenly express his same feeling.

"Okay, let's not talk about this!"

Outside the window, a dark unrestrained sandstorm blows, and the heavy sound of thunder is the harbinger of torrential rain.

"I still have something to do! I can't be stopped by the rain. I'll take my leave first." Yang Naiqi puts on his hat and urgently goes downstairs.

"This is the salary that the printing house gave you." Tian Xin takes out a paper envelope and puts it on the table: "Things should always be thought of in context. We still have many things more important than love waiting for us to do. I have already resigned the position at the printing office on your behalf. Recently, I believe there is an opportunity for you."

"I don't want to do anything anymore. Now I know from experience the thoroughgoing emptiness of life! Reputation, money, influence, it's all a deceitful game. I can't live here any longer." Jin Xiang looks out the window. As before, it is an overcast sky but rain has still yet to fall.

"Then you might as well go home again. When you want to come back, contact me first."

"This is all tomorrow's matter. Lao Tian, let's go drink two cups of wine! We'll pour out the loneliness in the bottom of my heart."

Jin Xiang and Tian Xin walk on the rainy street. The autumn wind again makes a greater effort to blow. Jin Xiang calls for a horse-drawn carriage to ride. Facing the wind and rain, it makes a death-defying effort to speed forward.

"Lao Tian! Tell me, what is life?" In the carriage, Jin Xiang suddenly grips Tian Xin's hand and queries.

"Life, life may just be a trek of suffering."

"So, is there no so-called warm love and happy enjoyment?"

"In some kinds of circumstances there can be. That love should be a friendship of helping one another. Enjoyment should be an essential offering of life."

Listening to the sounds from the horse's hooves, Jin Xiang sticks his head out of the vehicle's canopy. A fine and closely woven row of raindrops pours onto his face.

## Fourteen

The night is so dark.

Seasonal wind and rain shake the leaves off, to the very tips of their branches. They peacefully lie on the street, but after a powerful collision with torrential rain, they are easily damaged when tread upon.

Jin Xiang helps support Tian Xin walk out of the restaurant's doorway. Facing the few and scattered raindrops as they tread toward the way back at night, every withered leaf lying in the muddy water attracts all Jin Xiang's vision and thoughts, as if displaying the result of all destinies, which one cannot escape by luck or the utmost struggle. Sooner or later, there will be an abhorrent grave waiting to bury the lives that come out from here.

Tian Xin is swathed in the cool autumn evening wind. The excitement and liveliness possessed by young people are choked by Jin Xiang's depression. They are like two ghosts pacing the city's streets.

"Let's go see the hospital where I stayed!"

Tian Xin is following but does not yet understand what his actions are, going around a street, in front of a Western-style building. Jin Xiang walks in by himself.

Very quickly, he walks out cursing.

"Go back! They've all gone. They've all gone far away!"

They ride a horse-drawn carriage to the hotel again. Tian Xin helps support Jin Xiang into the room, unties the bundled packages for him, spreads out the mattress, lets Jin Xiang fall down, and before leaving asks the servant: "Mr. Jin is drunk, look in on him from time to time."

Before midnight, the servant hears a hoarse call, and in a panic walks in. Jin Xiang points at the teapot with his hand.

Jin Xiang drinks a pot of tea and cannot sleep anymore. He picks up a pen and wants to write a greeting letter to grandmother, but for a long time, for ages, he does not write a word.

He climbs down from the bed and sits on a chair. Quietly, he opens the curtains, waiting for another dawn.

At the time of daybreak, a wisp of purple cloud shines on the horizon, and the stars of the cold night become blurry. From gaps between buildings, little by little the sun climbs up with light and heat.

From the window, he looks upon the bald poplar branches. He thinks: In the end, a fallen leaf should be buried under its old branches, so at this time he

definitely cherishes the memory of his hometown. He wants to throw himself into the bosom of his hometown. At the same time, he again recalls the memory when he left his hometown: "Climb out of this destroyed village fortress!"

This sentence continuously gnaws at his heart. He is incapable of cursing again. He wishes for the arrival of destruction, of a joyful resolution, like an autumn storm.

His musings are destroyed as the servant brings forward, one by one, a letter and a postcard. The postcard has red printing type. He carefully examines it and, as a matter of fact, it is Li Shuang's wedding invitation.

Jin Xiang puts aside the postcard and tears open the old-fashioned envelope. Inside there is a page of letter paper written with a writing brush:

Grandson Xiang, be informed. Since you left, there is never any news. Grandmother is increasingly old. I know I don't have many days to live in this world. Now I really hope that you will come back and join me. Besides, staying in other places is not a long-term plan. It is better to farm in the countryside and seek food and clothing for life. In addition, neighbor girl, Hui Gu, got married last month and died of illness last night. Because she often accompanied you, so I inform you here together.

Grandmother's hand

He hesitates and paces back and forth, he thinks of Hui Gu's death. Cold feelings pass through his whole body, and he mourns the extinguishing of her young life. As if in only an instant, that world, the world that he thinks deeply about and looks back at nostalgically, has done its final farewell, and so ruthlessly.

He thinks again: He should go back. Although the village is just falling on its way to ruin, in the remaining days, should it not still also use the power of insignificant ones to succor its decline?

No more drifting leaves can be seen in front of the window. Jin Xiang leans against the window and gazes at the distant deep autumn season's cool and bright sky, and the silently flowing clouds. He thinks of the village in cowardly nostalgia.

## Postscript

That *Nostalgia* can be printed in a single edition, is quite a fortuitous matter. It has no objective and, at the same time, I also do not want to divide it into a certain stage in a personal writing journey. It is just to make it whole and present it in front of the people who love or care for it.

In the beginning, when I edited and rearranged it from the literary and art section of the newspaper, I always felt that there were a lot of unsatisfactory points that needed to be improved. When it came time to transcribe the original manuscript again, looking at the almost vulgar vocabulary, it seemed to be accruing the torment of my blood. For this reason, I no longer have the courage to improve it and size it up as a stereotype.

I would like to take this immature work as an analogy: Grapes all have a green stage, they whitewash my feeble mindedness; at the same time, green grapes may be moisturizing to dry throats, though their efficacy is inferior to ripe ones.

Finally, to the friends who have always given enthusiastic support, I hereby express my infinite gratitude and blessings.

March 1941, a window ridge

## Notes

- 1 “Travel fatigue” (*fengchen*) can also mean “chaos of war.”
- 2 A *kang* is a low, wide stove-couch used for heating, cooking, sitting and sleeping in north China.
- 3 “Man should take a wife, woman should take a husband” (*nan hun nü jia*).
- 4 The authoritative books of Confucianism.
- 5 A fox spirit (*hulijing*) is a shapeshifter spirit, either benevolent or malevolent. In this case, the latter. It can also be translated as vixen, witch, or enchantress.
- 6 Lao is a term of endearment, meaning “old.”
- 7 *Huangjin de zi niu* (Rus: *Золотой телёнок* / Eng: *The Little Golden Calf*) is a 1931 satirical novel about corruption, greed and personal failings, by Soviet authors Ilya Ilf (Ilya Arnoldovich Feinsilberg; Илья Арнольдович Файнзильберг, 1897–1937) and Evgeny or Yevgeni Petrov (Yevgeniy Petrovich Kataev or Katayev; Евгений Петрович Караев, 1903–1942). Jin Xiang was reading a Chinese translation.

## 15 Temptation (1944)\*

### One

Sometimes I cannot truly believe in myself. When I walked out of the university with a specialization in law, I did not know where I would wander to. I had lost the ability to differentiate and evaluate the diverse paths of life ahead of me. In front of them, I just felt degrees of vastness and silence. Occasionally, instigated by others, I had marvelous thoughts of becoming a worker at a printing house, a proofreader at a newspaper, or most happily an editorial assistant at a bookstore.<sup>1</sup> Frankly speaking, at that time the cultural institutions and the cultural people I contacted bedazzled me and I did not even consider anything else. For a while, I fully felt that the question of my career was difficult to solve or at least it must be postponed for a while. In my view, a person finding a career like me in this careless way and postponing it for a while can be said to be a really warranted crime! But who could guess? Just this year the government re-amended the Cultural Affairs Commission and, at the same time, adopted a comprehensive civil service examination for the appointment of officials at all levels. For us, such new society persons pacing up and down busy streets, unable to find a suitable position to settle into, it is nothing more than a beacon to guide us to return. After all, I cannot be said to be unfamiliar with fame and fortune! I am the same as other people, using my university degree as a resume, as a substitute for a Senior Civil Service examination certificate.

How, then, did I prepare for the exams for the various obligatory disciplines? And how did I take the tests? By now, I cannot clearly remember. All I remember is that it was the summer of that year. It was hot outside and even hotter inside the room. Moreover, the room could not be considered too big, but two to three hundred people gathered there to sit the exams. It was so hot and stuffy that it made them dizzy. Thankfully, I had made sure to have slept properly the few days before the exams and, unlike those who did not sleep peacefully for many nights, I could endure a lot. Even so, every time, after every exam, I always had to drink two or three cups of cold coffee as a cool and refreshing drink to stop feeling that I could not breathe.

\* Censored version in *Xin Chao* [New tide] 2.3 (April 1944). Published in full in *Dongbei wenxue* [Northeast literature] 1 (December 1945).

After the exams, I did not stay a day. Alone, I set off on a trip to the Songhua River. There is no denying it, in terms of my own character, I love river water much more than I love mountain ranges. Suitably, my family has lived many years facing a watery expanse. My ardent love for this non-stop, day and night flowing river can be said to be growing constantly! This time, because I am not willing to taste the bitter fruit of failure, or to listen to the arrogant, indulgent talk and laughter of other people grasping the brocade banner of success, I made an excuse to go to the banks of the Songhua River, to take a look at the leisurely flowing river, to come to my native place to wash away the more than three years of thin threads of rotten memories and in that return to take a long breath of really fresh air.

The Songhua River, the loveable “supporter of families,”<sup>2</sup> and its long flow of indescribable blue colors! Coming to the banks of the Songhua River, I sit the whole day at the front of the observation deck of a wine pavilion to enjoy the distant view from above. Looking at the river’s water, I look at the white clouds, watch the endless distant sails, and watch the continuous smoky haze. As I enjoy the distant views from above for a long time, they actually freely and at ease come in and out of my field of vision, as if gradually infiltrating my life. All, one by one, give me enlightening guidance, to make me know that the marketplace of fame and fortune is not my permanent hometown. My loves and hates sentence me to have entirely uninterrupted quiet days, to let me be as good alone as with another person. No disputes and no annoyances either, in this way to peacefully bring me to the twilight years of my life...

A desire to go and return forcibly occupies my chest, as all kinds of depraved thoughts of common customs remain. Suddenly, when I still had not fully settled my feelings, I received from a certain gentleman friend a congratulatory telegram for “passing the imperial exams.” It made my once-stilled heart confused and turbulent. Which road will I take? Should I pursue my permanent hometown? Or for the time being should I wade into the noisy field of life? My feeling is that the differences between these two ways cannot produce a conclusion. In front of my eyes, they cannot be measured for a little difference in propriety, and yet a little confidence to reject or accept does not exist. In a time of so much anguish, with fixed attention I indulge in deep thinking. I hope to have a road that I like... Finally, in the end reality prompts me toward the second road, to a bright future among crowds of people. After such a decision, at that time, I nearly could not recognize my true feelings. Vacuously, I took a fast night vehicle to hurry back.

In the latter half of this year, I served as a senior civil servant in the government. Another year in the spring, I was transferred from administrative management to be a prosecutor for criminal investigations. The essentials of my duties have not changed.

The beginning of this story is exactly the time that I was regularly in charge of inspections in the prison. As a rule, following the labor leader I walked again through the prison cells. I was guided by the warden and his chief guard to return toward the west side, the second-level hospitality room. Our group passed through a lonely, empty atrium. Suddenly, following by my side, a guard who I am unacquainted with quietly walked closer to my side and respectfully asked: “Are you the chief inspector today?”

I could not figure out his intentions. Vaguely I nodded my head towards him. He gave me a folded piece of paper less than three inches wide. At that time, I had no opportunity to quickly resolve this kind of enigmatic story. It was not until I got back to my own office that I took the piece of paper out from my pocket. First, I found in the bottom corner of the paper an abbreviation that rather resembled "Yan."

I really did not expect to meet the girl Su Yan here again. Perhaps she has already left the age of a girl, but Su Yan will always be young in my memory, a vivacious shadow.

After reading the note of a hasty few words, cherishing it I just put it in my diary. My heart, it is difficult to say it is excitement, yet at the same time it has a bit of the joy of meeting an old friend. Again, it makes me question: Why is she back here? Moreover, she really is a prisoner in custody. Although she writes: "Before long, you will naturally understand." I cannot clearly explain my misgivings.

This day, in the afternoon, uneasy emotions continuously agitate my chest. I do not want to do anything; I do not like to do anything. Leaning lazily on the back of a chair, I bask in faint sunlight. Physical and mental fatigue made me rapidly delve into chaotic fantasies.

## Two

How long has it been since parting with Su Yan? I do not clearly remember. These pressing years have made my life so complicated and chaotic. As well, when they laid waste to my memories, even the most difficult to forget shadow I finally forgot.

Ah, however, Su Yan is a bright pearl in my memory! Even if my memory gradually changes into a layer of ashes, there is no way to disguise the brilliance that bright pearl cast over me!

At that time, from among numerous communities, a most beautiful life induced me. That is a completely outstanding creation – a combination of spiritual holiness and purity, and the beauty of human beings – appeared before me, making me abandon myself and throw my body into this beautiful temptation, to make me feel happy for this brightness in life. In this way, I became acquainted with Su Yan.

The first time, Su Yan and I walked toward a concert.

Stepping with a rhythmic pace, I forgot what season it was. I slightly felt warm weather. What we talked about cannot be considered a lot, but we talked very congenially. We talked about the arts, talked about literature, talked about movies, talked about sports, talked about life, talked about dreams...

So, I gave life a hypothetical conclusion: "Life is an epiphany in a dream!"

Su Yan laughs. Her laugh makes me start to feel embarrassed. I think that perhaps she ridicules me for speaking words that are too empty. But when Su Yan sees my unnaturally shy appearance, it is as if suddenly she can guess what is in my heart.

"Mr. Wei, I love your ideas even more!"

I look at Su Yan's sincere face and I also smile, slightly.

Then, natural and poised, Su Yan takes my hand. We set our steps onto an asphalt road. The tall church, the Russian cemetery, the bright pavilion near the river, all are cast behind.

An air of youth flows over and enwraps Su Yan and I, just when Su Yan and I need a little comfort of age. Youth cannot string together the human heart, and of what use is reason? In Sun Yan's and my kingdom of youth, although blooming is not the law, nor morality, nor criticism – there is enthusiasm, there is only enthusiasm.

Enthusiasm. The fearful enthusiasm of young people.

On the road back from the concert, it is late night in the big city. In the night, the lamplights blink dimly on faraway buildings, the warm night wind dangles Su Yan's hair. The view of the expression on Su Yan's face is so beautiful, that beautiful face flashes with brightness from the streetlamps. Just now, starting to remember this shadow makes me do my utmost to depict and love the nothingness that is in front of my eyes. At this time, I forget myself, I feel that my whole life is just to live for Su Yan's love. If I should have a never-changing faith, then, Su Yan is a metaphor for my God.

To say it very frankly: After this, I profoundly loved Su Yan.

When I think of Su Yan, I can drive away the young person's sorrows that constantly attack and invade me, yet I feel that between this luxurious earth or a desert, there are also eyes and thoughts with friendly affection that follow me inseparably. Because of this, I feel a vague happiness.

At the same time, I am not really lonely anymore. Sometimes, I find out myself how to understand my feelings and my love for remembering youth as they all flow fully to converge on Su Yan's body. This kind of feeling, compared to being in love with my own youth, seems more vigorous and fiercer, more personal, warmer. Although this is not the same as being in love, in this regard, I do not have a little unease, a little jealousy. There is also no preconceived passion. This is just the sweet and refreshing peaceful thinking of the heart, not the sweetness and heated madness of the soul's sensory organs. When Su Yan and I were together, I never thought of loving another way or being loved one level closer. I did not know if she was my partner, friend, younger sister, or something else. I only knew that I and she being together is happiness, she and I being together is happiness too.

I truly did not expect anything; I did not want to have other extravagant thoughts. At that time, I had not reached that kind of age when I could analyze my own feelings, to set the definition of happiness and its limits. I was just calmly loving and being loved, happy not knowing what it is, and not knowing why it is. In my heart, I was satisfied.

It was as if Su Yan does not know her innocence and beauty. Gradually, the gentleness and unknown between us began to firm up. Without being tampered with, she was pure, just the same as her youthful girl's soul. Sometimes I got angry at her. Then, she was even angrier at herself, and she would not even speak to me of her grievances. If I saw her mood was as if she wanted to cry, I gently told her of my forgiveness, so she angrily changed to squeeze my hand, looking at me with a slightly red face, deliberately hiding a smile.



For a long period of approximately nearly two years, Su Yan and I enjoyed to the greatest extent what really can be said to have been a happy friendship. Theater, concerts, hiking, swimming, skating, cinemas... Generally speaking, one after one, we went to all the ordinary places of entertainment appropriate for young people. Su Yan and I played everywhere. However, between us, whether it was Su Yan or I, besides carrying a childish air of a gratifying kind of intimacy, we never raised other kinds of thoughts. Also, sometimes, when exhausted from travelling to lofty mountains or in the empty quiet mountains' vast forests, Su Yan would fall asleep face upwards in my lap. Besides protecting her from the mountain winds' invasion and harm, I gathered her tightly to my chest. I never blasphemed our friendly feelings with wicked ideas. It was as if two even younger children could not think of the rest of matters, apart from simple and pure entertainment.

But one day a piece of unfortunate news came to my ear. This was in the days that Su Yan and I were ardently in love. Not only because it was a full day of dreary wind and rain, that news made me feel a shiver through my whole body. It was said that Su Yan had already recently been engaged to a man. It was said that Su Yan had objected to this from start to finish. It was said that her only elder brother considered that this was because of the young girl's shyness and warm refinement. It was said that her silence and tears are no more than her pleasant surprise and emotional mood, and the hastily arranged engagement. It was said that within one month this happy wedding would be completed... These, from a friend of mine in Su Yan's courtyard. When I did not see Su Yan as I visited her home, my friend used the quietest voice to tell me everything.

In addition, he said even more. I did not have the courage to listen to any more of it pour out.

I walked out of Su Yan's home, alone. I walked through one street and then through another. I passed many unfamiliar streets that I did not know the name of. I walked along the riverbank with the autumn river's cold flowing water. Looking at the river's water, the nearly dusk sunset was starting to shine dimly on the woodland on the opposite bank. The river's water leisurely followed the woodland's ridges and peaks, flowing endlessly. Again and again, I paced back and forth on the sandy beach by the water, until my chest felt some grief and suffering. I boarded an empty, hollowed-out boat tied to the shore. I just sat on the side of the boat and I thought of Su Yan. At first, I felt the pain that love gave me, my first experience of the throbbing of an inextricable soul. I know how the river's water will suddenly send away my dreams...

Before long, the colors of the night gently stir. The boundless black river's water in the night sounds with the melody of bird's pharynxes. In the night, a kind of peace occupied the heart in my agitated soul. Regardless of what it was, even if it were the same as pain, it often made me cease misgivings and unexpectedly settled my mind. I seemed like a dead stone. Disorderly illusions were thrown into my dazed ignorance.

As the night approached, I slowly, hesitantly walked home. On the road, a few dozen steps from my home, I moved toward a drooping, mournful young girl. By the dim lamplight of the alley entrance, I could see that this is really Su Yan.

"Su Yan!"

I cannot help but blurt it out this way. After calling out, I deeply regret my recklessness. Why must I impart to deceive the two peoples' uneasy minds with an interaction?

Su Yan hears my voice and looks suddenly as if struck but then hangs her head down again. Without a sound, she moves her steps toward the place I stood.

Ah, tonight Su Yan is a sad, distressed Yan!

"I completely understand, Su Yan." In a quiet voice, as if I said it to myself.

Two deeply loving eyes, as if containing water, blink so familiarly at me. Then, the wordless silence continues.

"Too late. It's too late for me to come into your life."

...

Listening to the forever and ever death knell, I am distressed.

...

After midnight, the cold stars are like frost in the sky. The cold night wind pierces our clothes. As before, I look at Su Yan with her deeply drooping head. Due to the view from behind of the twitching shawl on her long hair, I know that this girl cries for me. But I already have no right to give her again even a bit bigger emotional attachment, to give her again embracing warmth. I quietly say to her: "Go back! Tomorrow, I will come call on you."

Like this, Su Yan is sent off. Slowly, the new moon hangs on the tops of the willow branches of the alley across. I look around this autumn night, as if on another day I might praise it or it could enrich me, but tonight I am indifferent, unmoved.

In the night, I lose my hearty sleep. My fingers turn on the lamp. I open a volume that makes me love to read it again and again, Lamartine's *Graziella*.<sup>3</sup> From in there on a page I read:

Time is a big ocean, like other oceans the same, laden with our bodily remains. We cannot shed tears for everyone; individuals have personal pains, every century has every century's regrettable matters, that suffices.<sup>4</sup>

...

I start to stubbornly cross-examine myself: Will Su Yan and I always fall into and wallow in pain? Otherwise, I have no way to deal with this reality before my eyes. In the past, Su Yan and I had some innocent friendship, falling in love, intimacy, or all kinds of feelings gathered to constitute admiration for her. I did not know how to love her. However, when I think that we must see our unknowingly solidifying cemented heart and hearts between her and I, and how life and life connections can abruptly change, I think that there could be someone to seize her from beside me and deliver her to another person. I think that to now she is my companion, sister, yet before long she will soon become a passerby, just indifferent and unacquainted. I think that she will leave her own home and I will not be able to see her anytime or anywhere or listen to her voice calling out my name. I think that I will not be able to return anew on the road after a get together at night, to read from her eyes which are often cast toward me gently and softly and, again, compose lines of wishes that so amiably shine upon my heart... As I think, the late night's layer upon layer of hollowness suddenly revolves around me. I have a

premonition that an unlucky day is about to enter. After that, she will not again enter this bedroom, she will not again softly and weakly lie down on this wooden bed, I will not again see her sitting at this table, and this terrace is just where I will not hear her very early waking up, the sounds of her running barefoot, and her laughing words. After this, on Sundays I will be unable to accompany her to go together to pray at church. This road that leaves me lonely walking and unable to find her shadow, is a story of a person yearning for death under a burning autumn sun – a lonely, dejected fortress. That seat in the dinghy that is only hers will forever be empty and I can only engage in small talk with the wind and the river's great waves... All, all kinds of impressions, all kinds of things are marked with all the superior habits of my and Su Yan's past life. My unlimited thoughts simultaneously roar and rise like a flash of electricity, not waiting for me to be able to differentiate their appropriate substances one by one. Whirling around, they are suddenly eliminated, and I am left in a limitless abyss of hollowness and loneliness.

Up to now, what exactly caused my initial feelings of friendship for this young girl? Moreover, I had nakedly indicated my sentimental loving attachment to her. I seriously cannot believe how friendship or intimate feelings have been so exceeded, that I have enjoyed in my life so many delights that I handled unclearly. Not at all a river's water, not a dinghy, not a lofty church, not a hillock in autumn, not a utopian music hall, not dusk, not night, it is only one living thing – Su Yan. If she walks away from me, everything will disappear because of her. In my current life, if she is lost, everything will then be over.

When my heart was turning like this for a long time, the night I passed continued to be longer than usual by even more unknown several times. Yet I still cannot have a way to find an appropriate explanation. In my pain, just as in my feelings, everything muddles me as if I am in a stupor from a sudden beating. I do not know where the pain is, but my entire body aches. But, in that limitless agony, I feel love's boundlessness.

Before the sky gives out light, I get out of bed. I do not know what kind of instinct orders me to leave Su Yan. It is good for Su Yan's happiness, it is good for my own tranquility, it is good to maintain Su Yan's memory of me in eternal love. In a word, I feel I must do it like this. I wrote on a piece of paper to leave for Su Yan. I allow no-one to be notified, I just leave.

Although in the end I cannot clearly remember what words were written on the piece of paper for Su Yan, this is the gist of what I wrote:

When it is time to leave, one should leave. If we believe that God's grace is boundless, then a second time will be granted to us.

I do not know why at that time I wrote the words that we could meet again. Who knows, in the end these words may be exactly the same as reality, from in myriad lives to again fix up Su Yan and I. Moreover, today, a today in which I have become the husband of a wife, a child's baba, and an official who absolutely cherishes the principle of righteousness, to meet Su Yan again: Is this good fortune or is it bad fortune? Ah, I cannot guess.

### Three

I look outside the window at the cloudless sky, clear and calm like the blue seas and oceans. I cannot help but urgently stop my routine and, from my leisure time trying to sleep, I toss myself toward the world outside the window. There, I feel that my mind and the sky have the same vastness as the seas and oceans, endlessly upheld. Thereupon, the warm rays of the autumn sun gradually advance me into a state of perplexing pseudo-sleep. My thoughts speed toward a condition of limitless remembering, profound with longing. I stay there for a lengthy time, waiting until just before preparation for the next interrogation to begin, when I am called to return again. Every time there is a break, there is nothing other than the pitiful sobbing of prisoners, confessions, begging for pity, and regretful anger filling this investigation room. The unhappy moods of so many people make this little room change, to sink into darkness and overt gloom. It is as if the sunlight of an autumn day cannot shine in. A fifty-watt electric bulb is lit and reflects flickering shadows in disorder on the ashen wall. The nib of a secretary's pen grittily slips non-stop on the interrogation notes. And me? I take my wisdom by means of language to inform people to start the interrogation.

When a volume of records passes in front of my eyes, I see on it a familiar and very resounding name: Su Xiaoyan. The charge of theft was sent over by some public security bureau. Solitarily, I thought about it for a long time. I order the guard to first bring forward this person to the investigation room.

I silently think: "Perhaps, this is Su Yan?"

Sure enough, when I am still indulging in my doubts, a guard leads a woman in. With apprehension and also understandable caution she walks to in front of my table. From her loose hair hanging over her shoulders and covering her forehead and face, from her walking posture and deportment, from her dress and personal adornment, I can see that it is Su Yan.

"What is your name?"

She is shocked by my voice. Stunned, she raises her head to look toward me. When her sight connects with my sight, I feel a kind of heat stream into my chest, I feel thirsty, and my throat dries up.

"..."

She does not reply to my words.

"Are you Su Xiaoyan?"

Deeply afraid that this deadlock may arouse suspicions beyond me and Su Yan, I call attention to her this way to induce her reply.

"..."

She nods her head.

"Did you get sent here by the Public Security Bureau because of theft?"

"Yes."

"Why do you need to steal things from another household?"

"There's no reason for this."

"Do you not know that stealing is illegal?"

"I don't know?"

"You do not know?"

"Because another person stole my things, they didn't receive any punishment whatsoever, nor even a little social censure was received, and so I just stole their things as much as it was possible to steal. I think of stealing even more things. Such stealing just illustrates my glory..."

"Do you suffer from neurasthenia?"

"No, not a bit."

"However, your mind certainly has an impediment."

"That's even more nothing to do with it. I can recite my history, to illustrate the memories of ordinary people and me. There is truly no difference, moreover, perhaps it would be even clearer!"

"Who stole your things?"

"It's just that thing the Public Security Bureau calls the victim. They used opulent language and grand wealth to seduce me and made me walk toward them. They just took advantage of years upon years to steal my chastity, my youth, and my beauty. Sir, is there anything more valuable than these combined in one body? Especially for a woman, losing these is the same as losing oneself. The little bit of jewelry or money that I stole is no more than my damages. That cannot compensate for every part of my damages, every fraction of it..."

"But, you know, there are no penalties for these in the law. That is to say, under today's criminal statutes, none of these can constitute a crime."

"When you start talking about law, you all sound the same. Let me ask you, who is the law set up for? Oh, I know that in your heart you must say it like this: *The law is set to protect the strong and exists to make the weak weaker*. Then, you are an undisputed abuser of the law. You arrange the law to cover up your faults. You arrange the law to deceive your own heart, but your faults are obviously arranged here. Your own heart that has been deceived and hidden from the truth will one day resist yourself. So, what should you still do?"

Suddenly, my head is addled as every word of hers is a kind of frightful counter-attack on me. It is my final lethal resistance of the stronghold I firmly rely on and at the same time I also have a premonition that the time is coming soon that I must renounce my stronghold. At that time, I will lose a lot of things, lose confidence in my position.

"So, you think that what you did is entirely appropriate?"

"Without doubt it's appropriate."

"You have to know, under today's social theory, your opinion is difficult to enact because individually motivated social relief can make social order more chaotic, more complicated and on the verge of a crisis of destruction."

"Besides individual relief, who else can I rely on? My strength is weak, my wealth is also limited. I plan to sue yet I have no money to get a lawyer. I plan to sue, yet no-one has given me instruction on the way to seek a fair referee. Sir, perhaps you can think of it, if you are not preposterous and unscrupulous, perhaps you can think of how many people are bitterly aware of their inadequacy when faced with a real challenge toward the law. They don't have the ability to resort to the law, they only have two ways to go: One is to endure everything, one is to retaliate against everything with one's own strength."

"..."

"So, I beg you to release me, because I am innocent. Even if it violates the stipulations of the law, I was unintentional from the start. I never intended to harm anyone. I have never deceived anyone. I frankly and straightforwardly confessed myself. I don't actually want to benefit anyone, or extort a little something..."

"I am refuted by your opinion. I feel very ashamed, but the law cannot casually pardon you."

"Of course, you can still cite a brighter upright shield to cover up your incompetence and panic."

"What is that?"

I really regret it. For what reason can I ask such words of a criminal who has committed a crime? Suddenly, my heart starts being agitated and loses restraint. I simply cannot handle my own heart.

"That is the authority of your office!"

This devilish sentence gnaws on me, tearing me apart. It gives the hit of a whole-hearted tremor to my unmovable confidence in my position. This sound reverberates throughout my entire physical body, causing me to no longer have the strength to continue this unfinished interrogation.

I look at Su Yan standing in front of the table. She is covered by her long black hair, her face is dark, dirty, and becoming thin but it gives off an expression of love and happiness. She, as I see it, resembles a young goddess who has suffered a calamity. The cruel injury imposed on her by the law adds unlimited radiance to her life and improves her beauty from the mundane.

Her brilliance illuminates my whole body, illuminates this little room locked in darkness.

#### **Four**

The second time that I interrogate Su Yan is the morning of the next day. Su Yan has still not been brought to the investigation room. On the one hand, I am putting in order the contents of her records, checking whether this case is almost arriving at a resolution. The secretary from time to time is at my side, trying to find out my opinion of Su Yan. Usually, perhaps once in a long while, there are issues, but now I have misgivings that he can see through the constant feelings of love between Su Yan and I, and that makes my face and ears flush with shame. If it were not that I was sitting facing the window, that might invite his suspicions.

Before long, Su Yan is led into this little room again. After she walks into the room, she very naturally nods her head toward me as if visiting a long-lost friend, then she sits down on a black backrest chair that I had specially arranged for her. Her eyes reveal a light of joy. It is like a double star falling from the borders of the sky, growing fixedly, looking at me.

In this condition, it is very difficult for me to deal with the case. At the same time, I have to seriously exercise my right to search and interrogate Su Yan as necessary, as well as to use again my eyes, my language, and all my movements to convey to her my good feelings for her, to encourage her happiness.

After asking her name, I roughly read again the crime facts written at the very beginning of the report.

"Are these writings all correct?"

"It's all good."

"In what way did you deal with these things that you stole? Did you sell them, or did you use them yourself?"

"Neither sold nor used. Most were just funds for alcohol and were left at a neighbor's wine shop. There was also a little that I randomly handed out to little children who were begging for food at my door."

"Do you really like to drink alcohol?"

"Yes, Sir, I especially like whiskey or vodka."

I remember that Su Yan cannot drink alcohol, but she says that she likes to drink alcohol. From this bit, the line of her life can be seen. So, I think about her life, simply anxious to understand how she lived through these years. I toss aside the motives, result and situation after the crime, which are all associated with the crime, and start to ask about her life story.

"When did you get married?"

"It was the fall of the year after I was first engaged, it was a really dreary autumn. I still remember that day we married, it was a day of cold rain. The raindrops drenched the back of my ceremonial skirt..."

"Who is your husband?"

"Him? I can't clearly remember his name. He was really a good person. After I was forced into the engagement and planned on running away from the marriage, he appeared in front of me. Vulnerable to attack from all sides, he saved me. He resolutely married me. He did not evade as taboo the public opinion spreading in society, he only loved me."<sup>5</sup>

"And after that?"

"He loved me to the extreme, he loved me so much more than I loved him, but he was a bit too poor. For our living expenses, he incurred a debt. He wasn't willing to wait and make me uneasy again. All day and all night, with all his might, he wrote a dictionary for a bookstore, trying to make up for this debt. Who knew, he'd still not written half of it, and he couldn't carry on. He still wanted to write it as in the past, and because of that he hurt himself. He died with this amount of unpaid debt."

"..."

"In his final sentence to me, he said: 'When you remember me, don't betray me!' But I was just at that age of negativity and emotionlessness. I couldn't block the many penetrating feelings hurrying towards me. Those penetrating feelings were like a pair of gentle and soft hands lightly grabbing me. After grasping firmly, they turned into the iron palm of a zombie, and made me unable to struggle away from it again, with the result that I've tossed and turned in long-term pain and fleeting joy, for almost ten years. Because of these days of life in prison, when I sank myself to helplessness, all of the many temptations are gone. Now, I desire nothing. Even this matter of being released from prison I have not been anxious to hope for. ...

"But you should not be so negative."

"Yes, I shouldn't be negative. But what so-called hope is there still for such a woman as me? If I am a rose that must bloom, then my flower has already withered. If the result is fruitful lychees, then when my fruit reached the maturity of

life it withered because of the cutting off of moisture... If I must have another suitable analogy, then I should be shell grass, without fragrance, without luster, and no care for it either. This is just my life.”

She talks about herself as if not actually talking about herself, like telling a moving story. From start to finish her sight focuses on my face. At this time her voice gradually lowers, she hangs her head down lower and uses two hands to cover her face. Su Yan is tired of worrying.

“Now I can say to you: If you can show your confession and correction for your crime I will carry out God’s decree, save you from your crime, exempt you from the sanctions that the law should impose on you, and beg society to excuse you, to lead you back to the original road you should go on, back to your happiness, back to your freedom. Go back to your own world.”

“I promise to carefully follow your advice.”

She uses the weakest voice to reply to me. Right up until just before she withdraws from this room, she does not say another sentence. It seems as if her soul has passed through an intense contest, as if it is too exhausted to bear anything.

And me? I dare not look affectionately at her anymore. I am afraid that my eyes could say that I am still, as before, in love with her or that for a long time I did not love her. To her, I think: All of this is harmful.

## **Five**

Evening, no-one comes.

I sit by myself alone at a table, with a pale green pedestal lamp. I start to flip through a volume of a diary that I carried for these many years. In it, every page records the story of Su Yan and I deeply attached to each other. At that time, all the heavy pressures of my soul were in my heart. Knowing that I used a pen to write them out greatly lightened them; now I think that perhaps language and writing have only the same fate for human beings! They are produced to specifically produce thought, just the same as trees are created to produce fruit, as when a person is pressed and rubbed by one’s emotions. Until one’s innermost being comes to realize that truths are produced outside in the first place, one cannot liberate oneself from emotions.

Reading these records of the past, I just cannot stop my heart from endlessly shaking. It seems that these many warm premonitions from the past have until now changed into memories and sorrow. If it were a person with fragile feelings, perhaps that could be cried for! Although I do not shed tears, my chest floods with feelings like turbulent lake water!

When the time arrives that I am powerless to read any further, I just toss it aside.

Looking at the green lamplight, the green nights, I give up halfway through night classes that review prosecution cases. I start smoking a cigarette and another cigarette, letting the smoky atmosphere entwine me, letting my room fill with a vast expanse of white smoke. It is just as if I am completely cut off from so many things, completely cut off from my own self. My anxious soul walks back and forth, getting more and more distressed.



I gradually approach a cruel hitting of my head, compelling me to ask myself: "Will you really pull the fate of you and the other person to sink into an unfathomable purgatory?"

No, I cannot. In any case, I cannot be so stupid and clumsy. With my position, my prestige, my honor, my duty... Each of them all implore me not to do it. In order to continue, to show consideration for and take care to preserve them, I cannot do that. Moreover, a prosecutor coming into contact with female prisoners – pornography, perversion of the law, impeachment..., oh! My head is groggy and heavy, as if a huge floodgate with millions upon millions of sections overturns and pours out, to press down onto my head. I cannot think anymore. I cannot think anymore.

A row of cold beads of sweat oozes from my forehead, as if the memory of frightening dreams still oppresses my chest, making my heart intensely, endlessly agitated. I silently say my prayers: "Ah, Holy Protector, please manifest a miracle! If everything is arranged by God, please do not make me act contrary to morality for one person's love. Grant me great, extraordinary powers to stop myself at the edge of a life where a crisis has fallen!" So, I do not want her showing love, I will leave her forever and never meet again, just the same as throwing away one of my beloved things.

But, just under the ring of the pedestal lamp's pale green light, right in my constantly turbulent incomprehensible thinking, I think of Su Yan's quiet whispers like a demon next to my ear once more: "Sir, I am not guilty, I beg you to release me."

To be blunt, I am being harassed by the whispers of this memory. Right now, they disturb my appropriate thinking. They rock my own unmovable faith. I weigh up my position, prestige, honor... I start to feel that the things on the other end gradually become heavier. The heavy thing is my emotions.

Then I also admit it myself: My heart is too frivolous, too young. It is not attaining maturity, not reaching full development and it is capable of producing on its own this kind of sacred burning zeal. But the zeal for another person that falls over my heart gives me such a sweet and refreshing, such a fresh impression. Just because I realize this part, I must have faith that I have produced this zeal myself.

After all, the one who sways me is always me myself!

I am powerless to eliminate my emotions. In other words, I am powerless to reject the external reflection of the flames projected onto me, and I cannot excessively mistreat a person's expectations, hope, and love. Within these layers upon layers of piled-up complex emotions and reason, reality and understanding, in the battle between human desires and animal desires, I feel as if I have already turned into a vacuous insect, beginning to walk back and forth toward the dark, not the clearly distinguishable road of life, not knowing which way to go...

Shaking endlessly, the shadow of Su Yan's face is at times hidden from view and at times appears in front of my eyes. Like this, what was once before constantly gratifying is duplicating again with a stubbornness that I formerly did not have. I love to attentively admire this shadow of a face. Like commonly seen things laid daily beside me, it is only when about to lose them that their value is felt.

Undoubtedly, it is the shadow of her face that continuously casts seductive senses to me and makes me unable to clearly distinguish between the basis of my impression of the sensation of friendship with her, or the impression given to me based on the expression on her face. It is just the same as I cannot clearly spy the color of a person's soul. I am trapped in self-sins and contradictions.

Extreme fatigue cannot even lead me into sleep. Enduring my heart, I keep watch on the lamplight, and start again a deep read of Lamartine's *Graziella*: "Every day I think about Graziella."

...

Her loveable and sorrowful pretty image is a kind of hatred of mine, yet sometimes it seems like a warm and gentle self-reproach...

I am just at the age of righteousness and frivolity, nearing an "ink is black" stage, to regard the most exquisite feelings of young people as a kind of harmful shame. I am just at the cruel age to bestow the finest of God – pure love with an innocent reluctance to leave – and then to discard it in the sands and let the latent worldly winds scatter it away...

Graziella cannot be forgotten, she is only hidden in my life. This love makes my heart happy, but it causes me to bow my head in front of others.

As for memories of her, they are only for me to luxuriate in when alone, with no-one around. In the world, it is just as if a kind of remorseful crime forces down on me.

How blushing am I now, I unexpectedly blush at the thought of the situation at that time.

A teardrop and a radiant glimmer of joy in her virginal eyes. Ah, it is almost as if because of these that I want to forsake the cold detachment of her image, all the sarcasm and all the ridicule!

People who are too young cannot love. They do not know the value of love, they only understand true happiness after they lose it.

...

True love is the ripe fruit of life.

...

My eyes start to burn hot. I feel my heart tumbling and thundering in my chest. I think about it: Is my intellect the cruelest and stupidest to forfeit the love that is left alive, hidden in my heart?

Although Graziella is not truly like Su Yan, I still have to say that this book was written for me. It is merely my own forthcoming prediction of a record of confession. The story in this book is no less than my story, the protagonist in this story is no less than myself.

Must I imitate the loss of righteousness in the heart, and the ruthlessness, of the book's protagonist? To do that is no more than producing the sad memories of old age, to only regret one self's recklessness and cowardice. If love is the everlasting lamplight in the world, what is the value of other people's criticisms?

Several times my eyes start to become hazy. I need sleep. I turn off the pedestal lamp. Chilly starlight slowly, consistently penetrates the yarn in front of the window, reflecting a sprawling flower shadow on the wall, like countless fiery eyes.

The wind rushes and howls like a pack of starving dogs.

**Six**

In the morning, cold wind patrols the streets.

I step onto newly fallen, nearly yellow leaves on the road toward the government office. I leisurely, and in a carefree manner, view and admire the delicate and charming gardens on the sides of the road, intermingling frost-stained reds and yellows. I do my utmost to push away the heavy emotional burden that was involved in my sleeplessness last night. But, not before long, my contemplation just easily drops onto the newly fallen leaves.

I think: I ought to help the fate of a leaf that was shaken to fall!

The leaves flip and fly in the unhelpful sky, striking the traveling, turning leaves onto the filthy street. The leaves are crushed into pieces under the footsteps of pedestrians. Yesterday there was still a bit of bluish-green resin on top of the branches. Today starts a jolted wandering about.

Who can forecast their own destiny that comes before one's eyes? If life is not a fully level road, if there are sudden floods and accidental storms, is this fallen leaf also a symbol of a person's fate?

I am afraid to think this way. Such imaginary sadness will depress me.

In a hurry, harboring a kind of feeling of evading something, I run into the government office. It is too early. The gate keeper is stunned by my coming so exceptionally early. I have no interest in saying hello to him. I push open the door to my own office and walk in.

Quiet, I sit alone in a vermillion leather recliner.

From the second story window, I see the exceptionally clear lake water of South Lake in the autumn, the long bridge over the lake, the woods, the islands and islets. They seem to be swimming in a liquid that is even more azure, more peaceful and quiet, than on a scorching hot summer day. It seems like the long bridge, the woods, the islands and islets have already felt the first tremors of winter that cause air crystals to glow like frozen water in a river. Yellow, pale-yellow leaves are scattered all over the embankment. Someone steps on the fallen leaves to pass by the embankment.

For whom should this kind of clear and bright world be arranged?

Autumn can make me feel the same sour ferment of youth. My impressions, my feelings, my conceptions, when collecting them together, they are organized into a resplendent domain in my thoughts...

Then, I ponder the growth to maturity of a lovable young life. I feel that I must do it this way, I must help the growth to maturity of young lives. I must release Su Yan.

Undoubtedly, I admit that Su Yan's fate is not ordinary.

I open the classic text of my job – *The Complete Book of Six Laws*.

On the certain page of a certain page, it is recorded like this: When the result of a search is sufficient to support the public prosecution of a criminal suspect, public prosecution should be pursued. But considering the prisoner's character, age, circumstances, nature of the crime, motive, result, situation after the crime, and other circumstances, if the indictment is not necessary, do not resort to disciplinary action.

Then, which reason should I select? I think to myself: Su Yan's character, Su Yan's age, Su Yan's circumstances... No matter what the basis of the reason is, Su Yan will always be listed outside of requiring penalty.

I should say it like this: It is Su Yan herself who can save Su Yan. It is not me and it is also not the statute book. Su Yan can receive all the augmented favors from God and people, just like her youth and beauty – they are worthy for a lover to admire her greatly.

Immediately, I root out all the doubts that still come at me intermittently. I write a note about no public prosecution or resort to disciplinary action for Su Yan. I seem to have done the most cheerful, most honorable job. I solemnly stamp my official seal on the document. Soon afterwards, I use the phone to tell the secretary, and prepare to have Su Yan's final interrogation before noon.

Quietly, I raise my head and sigh.

Following that, I worry again about how Su Yan will pass her days after this: A young woman, no home, no anything. Where can she go? Odious circumstances will make her walk anew the previous road. It is just like planting in mud a fresh flower that will then easily grow into a wild grass that loses its color and fragrance. This cannot be blamed on her, but should be blamed on the people who cannot handle well the planting of fresh flowers...

If so, how do I handle Su Yan's way of life henceforth?

I think. I cannot think of it. My head muddles as I enter the door of the investigation room. The secretary has already been waiting a long time for me.

First, the prison guard walks in and turns the light on for me. At this time, I am sitting in a chair staring at the ceiling. Very strangely, I feel that I had better smoke a cigarette, it should be great if I could smoke a cigarette!... Thinking, thinking. Following behind the guard, Su Yan just walks in.

Su Yan sits in front of me, without shame and without fear. I suspect that perhaps she might have guessed what my real intention is for summoning her to court, although I know perfectly well that is unlikely. The facts expressed by my heart will not be known by anyone.

"Was life for these two days bitter?"

In earnest, I also carry a touch of tender feelings toward Su Yan as I start to ask questions.

"Very bitter and very sweet."

I look at her mischievous smiling face and think in my heart: Ha, what a mischievous woman! But I should not use my smiling banter to change the tense and oppressive atmosphere that this interrogation is owed. At this time, I put my line of vision onto the records.

"Why is that?"

"Because I'm so lucky for the encounter."

"Your encounter?"

"Yes, my encounter."

"However, you should not misinterpret the facts before your eyes."

"Why should I misinterpret the facts before my eyes then?"

"Well, you cannot be too delighted with your encounter."

"I absolutely have this kind of belief that my conscience is right, Sir."

"Do you not sometimes express your fault for one of your actions?"

"Unlikely, unlikely." Su Yan says conclusively like in a somniloquy.

I start to feel a light degree of convulsion in my soul. Once again, I am conquered by Su Yan's will. It is as if there is a great crisis that exists before my eyes. My outgoing message is a way to lead me to fall into a crisis.

Here, I must clearly see my position and Su Yan's position. The difference in our status is so huge. This small room is no less than a precipice traversing the empty valley between Su Yan and me. It makes our distance seem so close yet it is so far in reality.

"I have already decided to release you."

There are no other words to say to Su Yan, it is just now for me to know about her days after this, yet I am also not willing to speak out and disturb this rather embarrassing state of mind. In any case, this is at long last an end. At the end of a story, it is best not to keep many seeds of memories.

Su Yan seems to have some words she wants to say to me. She takes a look at my face, maybe she is frightened by my serious face! She only gently moves her lips. Whatever words were not spoken.

I am afraid that this kind of silent and lonely scene will continue. I wave my hand at the guard and hand him the release order ticket. Thereupon, the shadow of Su Yan follows the guard to walk out.

Listening to the sound of the closing door, from start to finish I did not raise my head. I do not know when the secretary beside me walked out too. In the room there is left only me myself, and the memory of love that I hold.

I extend my hand and turn off the lamplight.

I stand up and turn toward the window. The quiet noon sunshine crawls onto my face, my hands, my body. My cold quivering heart is warmed by it. My eyes start to moisten.

## Seven

As dusk rises, I walk homeward carrying an exhausted body.

Lamp shadows, human shadows, cars and horses come and go like flowing water, cars and horses come and go like flowing water. These make me walk as if in a dream.

I count my own footsteps, walking alone.

The broken bits of my job concentrate in my chest in a helter-skelter manner, a subjectively formed important condition: A result of an aggravated offense, a justified defense, lightening up as appropriate, from punishment to professional training... Different words and expressions from my job linger these days. They do not wait for my call to harass me again.

Naturally, I really have relatively great confidence in my job. But tonight, for some reason, I have a little bit of a disgusted feeling. The start of this disgusted feeling is no different from a millionaire gentleman who is disgusted by his excessive bank savings. Maybe this could be said to be a common habit of humanity! Even if one is unrestrainedly eating and drooling over a long-coveted delicacy, at the same time it is very easy to get discontented thoughts and feelings.

My footsteps evidently slow down. I drag weary and listless uneven steps, just as if I am going to stamp the burden of my emotions into the soil, step by step.

From a distance, I can see the entrance to my alleyway. At this alley entrance, at the time that I walk through, a hand reaches out from the side shadows to stop me.

This start is rather shocking to me. Raising my hands, through my fingers I see this person's face by the lamplight of the not-so-bright alley entrance. I recognize that it is Su Yan.

"So, why have you stopped me?"

"..."

With an expression of reproach, I pretend to be stern and impatient. Since my heart is beating very powerfully inside, I simply cannot raise and maintain a calm intonation.

"Why can't I stop you?"

"..."

"Who says? Do you want to put on your prosecutor airs again? This isn't your investigation room; this is the street! Public figures who confuse public and private aren't very smart, eh!"

She smiles. Although I cannot clearly see the expression on her face, I judge from the shaking condition of her entire body that she is having a very engrossing laugh.

"..."

I really do not know how to deal with this difficult scene. This person who has been separated from me for nearly ten years is the person I was in love with. She is now unexpectedly again on this street corner in the dim night with no others. I am also just a single man in a strange land. Fate has us run into each other. If I believe that all of this is God's arrangement, it has to make me firmly believe in love, that it will not truly deceive me and that it will give me anew the friendship of Su Yan and I. However, it is still too late, our reunion is too late.

"I know that you have to walk through here." Looking at my speechless pained face, Su Yan explains it to me like that.

"Well, yes."

I nervously lower my head and shift my toes.

"Will you walk with me?"

She actually put forward this kind of request.

"..."

As for her request, I cannot think of any reason to refuse her. I nod silently.

Su Yan and I walk toward a quiet and secluded street. The houses on both sides lay prostrate, quiet in the night. Black shadows lay on the street. Night, perhaps it is late. Nor are there the sounds of dogs barking. I do not know how many glittering, crystal-clear stars sparkle in the sky.

"It's already such a long time that we haven't been together." Su Yan seemed to speak alone to herself.

"..."

"Shall we chat about the past?"

Su Yan quietly approaches me.

"I don't want us to put aside thoughts of our past dreams again."

Cold and cheerless, I look at the night sky, look at the stars. I am like a volcano about to erupt, the lava on the inside has already scorched me, but the outside is as cold as ever.

"Then, you are a person who denies the past!"

"It can't be said like that."

"You think I'm lying."

"I can never lie to anyone."

"In other words, do you think that denying the past is the way that you should go?"

"On the contrary, I think that building tomorrow is the way that I should go."

"Wei, you've changed. You've changed to be so stubborn and, so, even more loveable..."

"..."

"You have to promise me that we'll unite efforts for my tomorrow!"

I do not know when, perhaps when I am captivated in the center of launching my future life, we can actually be together. Just like before, Su Yan holds my left wrist in her hand. Su Yan and I step into the light of the night, walking on a dark narrow bridge. From time to time, fallen leaves mischievously blow on the fronts of our jackets.

We walk out the entrance to the street, close to the church on the lake embankment.

The top of the church tower stands in the boundless night sky, the top of the tower extends loftily into the night sky. Although I cannot see clearly, perhaps there is a bit that also cannot be seen. But there it is, as if a multitude of faithful spirits have been collected, looking down askance at the activities of these persons in this world who betrayed God's will. They are ready at any time to impose the necessary punishments on them...

Su Yan and I stand on the stone steps of the church.

We start by drawing a cross on our bodies with our hands, then we happen to coincide in starting our prayers. I am devout, and this is the first time since birth, since my conversion, that I have so devoutly prayed before the Lord.

Silently, we walk down a long flight of stone stairs.

Walking on South Lake's embankment road, stepping on the soft sand, the shadow of the church behind is cast into the dusky dim light of night. Like a hovering heavy cold fog, it starts to float all over this church, this embankment road, this lake. Ah, the dim light of the autumn night is a hazy and dreary picture!

"What are you praying to God for? Happiness, or something else?"

Without realizing, I look at Su Yan's hair blowing in the wind.

"This is a wish of mine, a most sincere wish. The days when I was in that prison cell, I made this kind of promise to myself, that when I gain myself again, I want to dedicate all the memories of the past to God, without any reservations. Now, I have already taken care of what I pledged. I begged the Lord to accept it for me, and to preserve it for me too. In my happiness and pain, I can be properly shown, made to remember, that when I belong to the one that I love, the history of my life should always belong to God, just as the outcome of my youth has already been dedicated to God in my memory."

She spoke to me very gently in a soft uninflected voice, as if her chest had already lost its vibration and agitation. There is only just a single note in her intonation. But the deep, absolved heart of mine murmurs like spring water flowing into a thick forest, soaking silently into the root tips of the forest.

At this moment, I mimic a road although I cannot even choose a path to help raise me up sufficiently. Even if it is a little bit of blind faith in her wildly arrogant emotions, they give me meaning and value to fix my eyes upon. It is as if layers upon layers of smoke for her all arise in front of my eyes, gradually manifesting me, undisguised, in front of me, in front of Su Yan.

We walk on a plank bridge that in the night we cannot clearly see the colors of.

"Can you tell me, what did you pray to the Lord for?" Su Yan says to me with eyes sparkling with hope. Taking advantage of the starlight mentioned above, I can see that Su Yan's eyes express her expectations.

"Huh, I begged the Lord not to lead me to temptation!" I gaze at a dim distant fire and answer her like this.

Su Yan hears my words and just smiles, but it was just a smile. Then she says quizzically: "So, are you saying that you are honestly facing temptation?"

"..."

"Wei, say it, yeah!"

What can I tell you? My feelings, my wishes, my dreams, everything exists for your existence, everything originates in your intelligent soul. Su Yan, my lovable temptress, in your trials I will always be sure to have your back. I can never control myself, although my intellect instructs me not to be close to you, not to repeat the same pattern. But completely contrary, there is never a time that my passion is not surging toward me, instigating me, attacking me. In the end, it is my passion that prevails. For it, I willingly sacrifice myself. When we have known each other for so long, how could I discard you beyond the barriers of my heart?

## **Eight**

Euphoric, Su Yan and I have a rich and generous dinner.

Then, we sit in a long armchair, drinking strong coffee that I personally brewed tonight. From time to time, we exchange words of friendship, a bedazzled glance, a tiny smile. I do not know why, I feel only an unspeakable happiness, right to the bottom of my soul.

Especially after walking out of my bathhouse, she drags her two bare feet wearily, as if without strength. She walks in front of the dressing table to fix up her night clothes. Looking forward to beautiful eyes, she then raises her head again. With a kind of customary shake, she makes her hair flutter endlessly around her shoulders. When she finds that I am looking at her again, her face is shrouded with splashes of light red, as if ashamed of being this beautiful. Several times her beautiful new radiance of being mellower, fuller and plumper renews me, as if I only saw her for the first time. Moreover, in the past my dear ones have also made me express surprise at her beauty, and that turned into a kind of timidity and confusion.



What I never thought of, or appreciated, before is her new radiance. Her youth and beauty create a kind of great glamor for her, for others to praise. For me, it constitutes a kind of crisis.

When Su Yan sits next to me, I invariably smell the strong fragrance wafting from her body, in addition to the newly donned chrysanthemum bought from on the desk at the flower nursery. In the lamplight, there is also a gorgeously steeped, deep and remote, strong and pervasive, fragrance revealed. This night can really obsess people. A poetic night, poetic visitors, the autumn evening – although it is more solitary and desolate, my room possesses more lovely warmth than in spring.

So, the route of our conversation, to sum up our talk, is nothing more than the mutual disclosure of finishing off the emotions of deep attachment to each other. The shadows of the cold, sour life of those days, to this day, all combine to exhaust her heart. She says that if she had not caught sight of me here, she could not handle picking up a new life again. Besides death and insanity, there was no road that could allow her to walk forth. She says that the passion in her soul has already found the first and last delivered gift. She says a lot, says everything. I take her hand and grasp it in my hand. I feel a warm current start to swash with vim and vigor in the blood of two people. Seething with excitement, we only wish for the quiet's continuity so that we can spend a happy evening whispering, with no-one to intervene.

However, the night deepens by degrees.

As the night begins to deepen, the empty world quietly goes to sleep without a sound. Although both Su Yan and I drape double-layered clothing over our shoulders, finally in the end it is difficult to resist the cold night and the invasion of sleepiness. It is the need to sleep deeply again. I look at Su Yan and Su Yan looks at me. That explains that we really have a common desire and expectation, but it is hard to speak it all out loud.

Without words, we sit another minute. Drowsiness makes Su Yan and I unable to sustain it. From time to time, we both doze off.

I try my utmost to constrain the agitation of my heart beating. I say: "Why are you still hesitating? If we sincerely love each other, maybe it's irrelevant! I think we don't need to be overcautious, can't you come to sleep on the bed where I sleep like this?"

Su Yan uses a woman's shyest expression to look at me. Without expressing objection, without expressing approval, she just unties layer upon layer of her clothes and lays down on my bed. Although my bed is not that big, it is more than sufficient to hold two people who love each other. From this night on, Su Yan without fear unveils an even heavier curtain of deep attachment to me.

People who abandon themselves to their own pleasures can often be paralyzed by reality. For many days, I do not go to my shift to carry out my duties. During this time, Su Yan and I practically do not part for an instant. Even if there is an action for a very short time, we are both willing to take identical action together. When I think that there are no matters that must be done this day, we embrace in the pillows and quilt until the sun shines through the window of the room, all over the bed. We chat without the slightest trajectory, we talk about numbers of things,

talk about life, talk about dreams. The result is a sweet vow of listening intently to each other's love, very happily writing smiles from the heart on our faces.

In this way, I start to feel infinite love and the preciousness of life. Afterwards, it makes me forget my wife and child in my hometown that I have left far away, my sacred duties, everything outside of myself. I completely compromise myself in leading a life of real pleasure. Beyond a doubt, I have changed into a fatuous and self-centered insect.

But, in these times, from start to finish, I do not believe that my judging myself is right. I think that it is just an accidental haunting of reason, and that so-called reason is nothing other than tradition based on the occurrence of habits. It cannot be used as a light to point out my going astray, and it can no longer be my deeply convinced lifelong standard of how to be an upright person.

So, when the news that Su Yan and I live together spread widely to my friends, even if it encountered so many enthusiastic kindhearted dissuasions, although the ways they adopt are not actually the same, the opinions summed up are nothing more than:

"You must part."

"You can hurt yourselves if you go on like this."

"Love like this is no less than a trap, especially for Wei, your future, this is simply a trap that must be spoken up about..."

"..."

"..."

Toward the sincere advice from numerous friendships, for me, I can only respond with a scornful smile, that is it. Perhaps there are people who think it is excessive for me to treat some loyal friends with the greatest silent scorn. In fact, this is not to say that it is honestly because I cannot bear the dejection of my own free will. I always think stubbornly like this: Only human emotions are the most savage and sour. It is no longer an honor to incessantly smash others' dreams to accomplish one's own hopes. Dejection, frankly criticizing others' faults, advice... These are nothing other than a kind of manifestation of selfish desire, that is all. At that very point where it wants to breach the opponent's position and contribute to their own position, the conclusion I clarified before is no different. This is human honor; it is also human despicableness. In groups of animals other than humans, even as growing owls peck the meat of its two parents, I have never heard that, when an opportunity arises, they frankly criticize the faults of others of the same kind. Naturally, among owls there are no so-called saints and no worldly-wise ones that exist. This is nothing more than an illustration. Among groups of animals other than humans, they take the activity of free will as a kind of virtue but among intelligent humans there is neither a time nor place that the development of free will is not repressed, to make it dejected, to make it surrender, to exterminate it...

Therefore, the reason why I do not hesitate to discard the advice of friendly sentiments is not really without reason! As a result, I love my determination.

So, Su Yan and I peacefully passed a happy winter. Nothing came to disturb the tranquility of our lives. We passed days of such sweet and deep love for each other. As for the abandonment of my friends, in my reality it led to the utmost benefit!

**Nine**

The season moves into another spring.

Spring. Su Yan and I awaken to the song in front of the window of little birds we know not the names of. From time to time, the fragrance of flowers wafts in. As I open my eyes still heavy with sleep, the strong vitality of spring presses upon my heart, making the pain in my chest, which has been covered with dust for a long time, suddenly open and clear, to bear the first blessings of spring.

At long last, spring is the kind of season when all things on earth are growing! Our joy of yesterday seems unable to resist the pretense of spring, from trembling to breaking into a deadly crack. So far, the happiness given to us by the love of yesterday is nothing but the ceasing of a big, distant and indistinct, aftertaste. It seems that all the great joys and happiness were just a flash in the pan craze. If wanting to carry on with a split second of happiness, spring and beauty must be dazzled in a state of confusion, with intoxicated and crazy moments. This kind of extreme circumstance of madness is but the fruit of a momentary illusion. Its infinitesimal reality will shatter after a slight touch. Such joy and happiness are built in the clouds.

The fantasy world of Su Yan and I is so very easily shattered by spring.

Accompanying the arrival of spring, we both have inexpressible annoyance. No matter when Su Yan and I are together or when Su Yan puts me aside and walks alone, a kind of weighty spiritual pressure makes me silent and even speechless. Here, including cherishing the memory of my hometown, regret for my wife and child, and self-censuring, among them not one can teach me how to sweep away the dust from my heart to take off the heavy pressure. It is just that the heavy pressures of the long duration of time we entered into together is more aggravating, makes me unable to gasp for a breath and makes it more difficult to forget them even for a moment.

Su Yan's annoyance may be even deeper than mine. Whenever she indulges in looking at me silently, it is just like seeing through the inside of my soul. So, she arranges all kinds of recreation sure to amuse me or she teases me with laughter and banter. Yesterday, these cheap tricks all made me fanatically crazy, but now I am not able to turn attention to the provocation of my emotions. I know this can embarrass Su Yan, but I cannot lift away the melancholic veil over my soul and grab anew the joy and happiness of yesterday because this is the complete exhaustion of love. And Su Yan? It is obvious that the long joyless days have made her lose her stubborn patience toward love. She looks like an autumnal Yan.

The good health, plump and smooth-skinned body cannot fill again an emptiness of the soul. Su Yan's beauty follows love's rhythm of time to develop, with her face, waistline and legs – all of her – becoming more substantial and imbued with resilience. But once the soul's reality beneath the surface is completely lost, what can that vain body deserve?

One day, it was Sunday. Su Yan and I sat in front of the window. Basking in the sunshine, we continue to be still silently lost in thought for a long, long time, watching the flower sellers yelling and walking to and fro, watching butterflies fly near the window and faraway. Su Yan only then whispers to the window:

"This season, I only harbor hate for you. For you, I only have an unspeakable curse, my criticism..."

"You, what reason do you have to bother the season?" I exert myself to constrain my frustration and ask calmly and tenderly.

"You know full well, yet you intentionally ask me. Okay, let me say it: The reason why I detest this season is that it doesn't want to reconcile with my world!"

"So, do you secretly hate me?"

"No, I truly don't hate you. I know, whenever men have attained the satisfaction of love, they will immediately think of their career. Now, I only hate myself. In order to firmly grasp onto you, I should absolutely not quickly give you tremendous satisfaction..."

Su Yan's long eyelashes pass through the sunlight to stick tightly to her eyelids. She may just be lingering in a state of deep thinking with her eyes closed. If there is a great variety of pain in love, then she has tasted one after another to the greatest extent and now she has no determination to endure the pain of love!

One day, I return from the office in the evening.

I see her using crude stitches to sew an old golden yellow button on a bluish green coat that I bought for her not long ago. I feel exasperated by this display. I remember that the buttons on this coat have never been lost. Moreover, she is truly sewing on such an unsuitable gold button. What is this for? I cannot think of it.

"Are you busily sewing it?"

I walk close to Su Yan's side.

"Yes."

She raises her head indifferently and looks at me. Her indifferent expression first gives birth in me an unhappy mood toward Su Yan.

"Why must you sew on that old dirty button?"

"It is indeed dirty. It was bought for me by a friend in the past. To sew it on is just to have this new coat also have a little old thing on it. Just like the ancients, when building a new temple on the foundation of an old temple, they always very carefully inserted a little old material into the new material, at least one pillar, to make the new building have a little antiquated thing in it. Even if the memory itself is easy to wear away and vulgar, among the masterpieces of the new holy place, it holds haunting respect and magic in people's hearts. Don't you understand?"

Bearing a little unhappiness, and a little ridicule, this meager pejorative answer made the constrained emotions even heavier in my chest.

"Which friend gave it to you? Can you tell me? I'm afraid that it was given to you by a very handsome and sociable boyfriend! Say it, are my words correct?" I endure my indignation yet in this way I sound out a retaliatory attack on Su Yan.

"Stop talking, you really insult me, you don't even treat me like a person. Wei, you misread people, I cannot be casually deceived by you. And you have no right to ask me this rubbish..."

She suddenly cries, she stops her stitching, she tears off the button that she had already sewn on and throws it far away. Then she cries to me in an aggrieved tone.

At this time, I just now feel that I am wrong, that I ridiculed her beyond the boiling point. Moreover, I stabbed her in the heart. Even if she did do that to me,

I should not give her immediate revenge. How pitiful is such a person's narrow and limited moral character? I beg her for understanding, I say to her that I asked like that on purpose just because of the reason that I love her so much, that there is no malice involved. But I have broken her heart. She no longer listens to me. She chokes with sobs.

Since then, in our lives an infinite background of sadness has been concealed at times and appears at times. There is absolutely no way to make it lessen. Gradually, its dark shadow enlarges. We cannot see clearly what this is for in the end, but fate can know – and it has a premonition that our time together will be of a very short duration.

The world is too vast, life is too vast too, but the world of Su Yan and I does not stop here. I always thought that there would be a day when we would discover that we will not meet one another again under the same sunlight or moonlight. This is a kind of separation that I would rather not say than have to say it! At this time, we are sundered very far apart, stupefied to the extent that we forget our vows of love and relinquish many memories that endlessly churn like lake water.

As expected, the time approaches.

Dusk. Stepping into the dusk of May, I accompany Su Yan to walk down a long and lonely street. For a long time, neither of us speak. We avoid talking, as if we are afraid that something will drive away this only time that we have. We both keep silent.

Passing through a narrow little alley, we take a few more steps and there should be the sacred church. As in the past, it is the lake waters of South Lake again.

Su Yan uses the weakest voice, like whispering to herself: “Okay, let's do away with the past!”

Shuddering, I receive notice of my final fate. Perhaps this is the fate that I have so long waited for. In the end, Su Yan hands it to me today. I have no sorrow, I have no dread, I have no hate. My feelings are as calm as a fallen heavy black lead stone. I truly have no consciousness. I just follow Su Yan to walk.

Passing in front of the church's door, I look at the motionless, sharply towering spire of the immovable church in the mist of the night. Su Yan stands peacefully on the stone steps and lowers her head. She uses a skinny finger to draw a cross. Also at a loss, I cannot tell which finger I use to draw a cross on my chest...

## Notes

- 1 In Manchukuo, it was common for major bookstores to publish reading materials.
- 2 “Supporter of families” is *ke jia zi*.
- 3 Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869) was a French author. *Graziella* (in Chinese, *Gelaiqila*) is his 1852 tragic novel that recounts the separation of a man and woman who were deeply in love and then separated, resulting in the woman's death.
- 4 The original French phrasing is slightly different: *Time is a big sea [that overflows], like other seas, with our debris. We cannot cry for everyone. To each man his sorrows, to each century its pity; it is enough* (translation by author). Alphonse de Lamartine, *Graziella* (Paris: de Lamartine, 1852).
- 5 The taboo is likely arranged marriages, which became increasingly frowned upon by educated youth.

# Glossary

(traditional characters are used for persons and institutions that would have used them exclusively)

Aixinjueluo Puyi 愛新覺羅·溥儀

Ba bao 巴堡 Fort Hope

*ba bu* 八不 Eight Abstentions

*bai jiu* 白酒 white alcohol

Bai Lang 白郎

Bai Shihai 白世海

Bai Xueru 白雪如

Baochi 宝坻

Baoshan 寶山

*bu zhidao you mingtian shi de* 不知道有明天似的 don't know there is a tomorrow

Chang Chunteng 常春藤

Chang Feng 常风

Changchun *jinbu zuojia jihui* 長春進步作家集會 Changchun Progressive Writers Association

Changchun *si lao* 長春四老 Changchun's Four Elders

Changchun *weikun zhan* 長春圍困戰 The Siege of Changchun

*changshan* 長衫 traditional long jacket for men

Chen Lifu 陳立夫

Cheng Duolu 成多祿

*chenghe de xueshui zhong tanguo* 成河的血水中淌過 pass through a river of blood

Chongwen 崇文 Esteem the Arts

Cui Guniang 翠姑娘

Cui Yongyuan 崔永元

*da ducao* 大毒草 big poisonous weed

Dan Di 但娣

*dangran* 當然 naturally

*Dazheng* 大正 Great Government (Hall)

Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平

*Dì'yī huí Mǎnzhōu měishù zhǎnlǎn shūfǎ bù* 第一回滿洲美術展覽書法部 The Calligraphy Department of the First Manchuria Art Exhibition

- Dong san sheng guan yin hao* 東三省官銀號 Bank of the Three Eastern Provinces  
*Dongbei minzhu lianjun* 東北民主聯軍 Northeast Democratic Coalition forces  
*Dongbei sida zhiming fufu zuojia* 東北四大知名夫婦作家 Northeast's Four Famous Husband-Wife Writers  
*Dongbei wenwu kaogu di'yi ren* 東北文物考古第一人 Northeast's Number One Person in Cultural Relics Archaeology"  
*Dongdazhangzi dadui* 东大杖子大队 Dongdazhangzi Brigade  
*dongluan* 动乱 turmoil  
*douya cai* 豆芽菜 bean sprouts  
*fanMan kangRi* 反滿抗日 Oppose Manchukuo, Resist Japan  
*Fanxue tang* 泛雪堂 Fanxue Hall  
*Fazheng daxue* 法政大學 University of Legal Administration  
*feidianxing* 非典型 atypical  
*feigongkai chuban, wu shang fabiao, taotuo jiancha* 非公开出, 版物上发表, 逃脱检查 non-public publication, publishing material [to] escape investigation  
*Feng Qiyong* 馮其庸  
*Feng Ying* 冯瑛  
*fengchen* 风尘 travel fatigue / chaos of war  
*Fengle juchang* 豐樂劇場 Fengle Theatre  
*fennu qingnian* 憤怒青年 angry youth  
*Gelaiqila* 葛莱齐拉 Graziella  
*gozoku kyōwa zu* 五族協和 Harmony of the Five Peoples  
*gu nanren* 雇男人 hire a man  
*Guan Monan* 关沫南  
*Guandong san caizi* 关东三才子 Three Talents East of the Pass  
*guanwai* 关外 beyond the pass  
*Guomin shudian* 國民書店 National Bookstore  
*Guomin tushushe* 國民圖書社 National Library Society  
*guyu* 谷雨 grain rain  
*Haerbin wenxueyuan* 哈爾濱文學院 Harbin Literature Institute  
*haishang de qiu yu* 海上的囚獄 prisoner on the seas  
*heishan baishui* 黑山白水 black mountains, white waters  
*heli* 合理 reasonable  
*huahua sheng* 哗哗声 whistling sounds  
*huajie liuxiang* 花街柳巷 red-light district  
*Huang* 黄  
*Huang Guangnan* 黄光男  
*Huang Xu* 黄旭  
*Hui Gu* 慧姑  
*hulijing* 狐狸精 fox spirit / vixen / witch / enchantress  
*huo huashi* 活化石 living fossil  
*Jao Tsungy-I* 饒宗頤  
*Jia* 嘉  
*jiang cheng* 江城 River City  
*jianren guan* 薦人官 recommended officer  
*Jiang Deming* 姜德明

- jiangshan* 江山 mountains and rivers / one's country  
*Jiao Renhe* 焦仁和  
*Jieping* 浩萍  
*jilie fankang* 激烈反抗 fiercely rebellious  
*Jilin caizi* 吉林才子 Jilin talent  
*Jilin san jie* 吉林三傑 Jilin's three masters  
*Jin Ge* 靳革  
*Jin Xiang* 金祥  
*Jingui* 金贵  
*jingji shehui* 经济社会 economic society  
*jiuwei le de dadi* 久违了的大地 long-lost land / long-lost territory of a nation  
*kan sanguo diao yanlei* 看三国掉眼泪 Seeing the Three Kingdoms and crying."  
*kang* 炕 a low, lengthy earthen couch/bed/stove used in northern China and Manchuria  
*Ke Da* 克大  
*ke jia zi* 克家子 supporter of families  
*Ke Ju* 柯炬  
*Kuangguan ting* 旷观亭 Kuangguan pavilion  
*Lan Ling* 藍苓  
*le tu* 乐土 paradise land  
*Li* 李  
*Li Huan* 李煥  
*Li Jie* 李介  
*Li Jingshu* 李鏡書  
*Li Lisan* 李立三  
*Li Mingshan* 李名山  
*Li Mo* 李莫  
*Li Peng* 李鵬  
*Li Qi* 李奇  
*Li Qian* 李千  
*Li Qing'an* 李慶安  
*Li Qinghua* 李慶華  
*Li Qingzhong* 李慶中  
*Li Ren* 裡刃  
*Li Shangyin* 李商隱  
*Li Shaoqiu* 李少秋  
*Li Shengchun* 李生春  
*Li Shuang* 李爽  
*Li Wenxin* 李文信  
*Li Xin* 李鑫  
*Li Yichi* 李一痴  
*Li Yingchun* 李迎春  
*Li Yu* 里予  
*Li Zheng* 李征  
*Li Zhengzhong* 李正中  
*liang jin ru, ren jin chu* 糧禁入, 人禁出 food prohibited entry, people prohibited exit



Liang Shanding 梁山丁

Liang Surong 梁肅戎

*lihai xingge* 利害性格 formidable character

Lingxi 岭西

*lishu* 隸書 clerical script

Liu Longguang 柳龍光

Liu Mingyuan 劉名遠

Liu Qing 柳青

Liu Shaotang 劉紹棠

Liu Zhongquan 劉鍾泉

Liuba 柳巴

*liudu* 流毒 pernicious influences

*liutiao bian* 柳條邊 Willow Palisade

Liuye 柳叶

Longquan 龙泉

Lu Xun 魯迅

Luli 卢丽

*luan shi gang* 亂石崗 tumultuous stone post

*luman* 魯莽 reckless

Ma Zicai 馬子才

Madan 玛丹

*mahjiang he kafei shi de shechi shenghuo* 麻將和咖啡式的奢侈生活 *mahjong* and coffee-style life

Mala 玛拉

Man Zhan'ao 滿占鳌

*Manzhouguo wenyijia xiehui* 滿洲國文藝家協會 Manchukuo Writers and Artists Concordia

Mei Lanfang 梅蘭芳

Mei Niang 梅娘

*mengmo* 梦魔 dream demon

Mikami Tsugio 三上次男

Motuofu 莫托夫

Mu Ke 木可

Nakamura Masanao 中村 正直

*nan hun nü jia* 男婚女嫁 man should take a wife, woman should take a husband

*nei zhu* 内助 inside help / wife

*neibu* 内部 internal

Ni Yunlin 倪雲林

Ni Zan 倪瓚

*Nihon Sankyō kenchiku shiji Tsutomu-sho* 日本三共建築師事務所 Office of Nihon (Japan) Sankyō Architects

*nüren de benshen* 女人的本身 a woman's intrinsic self

Ouyang Shanzun 欧阳山尊

Ouyang Yuqian 欧阳予倩

Pan Wu 潘蕪

Pan Xiangning 潘香凝

- Qian Ti 潜媿  
 Qiming 启明  
 Qin Mang 秦莽  
 Qin Xiaoyi 秦孝儀  
 Qiulin 秋林  
*quzhe shuxie, gongkai fabiao* 曲折書寫, 公開發表 zigzag writing [to] publicly publish  
 Rong Mengmei 荣孟枚  
*ryōsaikenbo* 良妻賢母 good wife, wise mother  
*San jin dong* 三進東 Three into the East  
*San xia jiang nan, Si bao Linjiang zhanyi* 三下江南四保臨江戰役 Campaign of Going South of the River Three Times, to Guard Linjiang Four Times  
*San zhongjing* 三中井 Three Nakai  
 Shan Ding 山丁  
 Shangguan Ying 上官纓  
 Shanhaiguan 山海關 Mountain Sea Pass  
 Shaxia 沙夏  
 Shi Wan 史宛  
*shidai de cuowu* 時代的錯誤 error of the era  
*shu chuangzi* 书床子 book bed  
*si zhi hei tian'e* 四隻黑天鵝 Four Black Swans  
*siheyuan* 四合院 traditional northern courtyard home  
 Sima Songdun 司馬桑敦  
 Song Xiaolian 宋小濂  
 Su Xiaoyan 苏小燕  
 Su Yan 苏燕  
 Sun Changxu 孫常敘  
 Sun Qian 孙荃  
 Sun Xiaoye 孫曉野  
*Taifahe* 泰發合  
 Tian Lin 田琳  
 Tian Xin 田鑫  
 Tōjō Hideki 東丈秀樹  
 Uchiyama Kanzō 内山 完造  
*Uchiyama shudian* 内山書店 Uchiyama bookstore  
 Wan Nianqing 萬年青  
 Wang 王  
 Wang Aiji 王愛集  
 Wang Benzhang 王本章  
 Wang Guanglie 王光烈  
 Wang Jinlian 王金鍊  
 Wang Pushan 王朴山  
 Wang Qiuying 王秋螢  
 Wang Shixi 王氏習  
 Wang Wenshan (Shaoshi) 王文珊 (少石)  
 Wang Xizhi 王羲之

Wang Yuping 王君平

Wangdao 王道 Kingly Way

Wei 韦

Wei Changming 韋長明

Wei Chengming 魏成名

Wei Feng 韋烽

Wei Jinchen 魏近辰

Wei Kai 魏楷

Wei Ruoying 韋若櫻

Wei Youlan 魏友蘭

Wei Zhiji 魏之吉

*weibei* 魏碑 stele style calligraphy / tablet of the Northern Wei Dynasty

Weigu 卫固

Wu Lang 吳郎

Wu Ying 吳瑛

*wu zu xiehe* 五族協和 Harmony of the Five Peoples

*wula* 韃靼 *wula* (shoes)

*wutou* 无头 headless

*wuwei* 无尾 tailless

*xianqi liangmu* 賢妻良母 good wife, wise mother

Xiao Hong 蕭紅

Xiao Jin 小金

Xiao Jun 蕭軍

Xiao Ke 小柯

Xiaozhenxian 孝貞顯

*Xiehehui* 協和會 Concordia Society

*xin de tudi* 新的土地 new land

Xing Lan 杏郎

*Xingya zazhishe* 興亞雜誌社 Flourishing Asia Magazine Society

Xingzi 杏子

Xu Nailin 徐鼐霖

Xuan Ling 璇玲

*Yan bin lou fandian* 宴賓樓飯店 Banquet House Hotel

*Yan Ran ting* 燕然亭 Yan Ran pavilion

Yana 亞娜

Yang Cideng 楊慈燈

Yang Naiqi 楊乃騏

Yang Xu 楊絮

*yaya* 呀呀 (sound of the seawater)

*yi hu er jin duo jiu* 一壺二斤多酒 more than two catties of wine

*Yizhi shudian* 益智書店 Puzzle Bookstore

*yizu xue xi de nüren* 異族血系的女人 a foreign-blooded woman

You Guochen 游国臣

*Yuanming yuan* 圓明園 Gardens of Perfect Brilliance

Yu Dafu 郁達夫

Yu Jin 餘金

Yuan Xi 袁犀

*Yunhe zhi zi* 運河之子 Son of the Grand Canal

*Yushu* 榆樹 Elm Tree

*Yuwen* 毓文

*zao shu* 棗樹 date tree

*ze lin* 择邻 choose neighbors

*zhan hou chubai, chongjian tianri* 战后出版, 重见天日 post-war publication,  
[to let the writings] see the sun again

Zhang Jiuling 張九齡

Zhang Shuguo 張樹國

Zhang Weiran 張蔚然

Zhang Xingjuan 張杏娟

Zhang Xueliang 張學良

Zhang Yumao 張毓茂

Zhang Zuolin 張作霖

Zhao Dayou 趙大有

Zhao Yidi 趙一荻

Zhao Zhiqian 趙之謙

Zhaoti 趙媿

Zheng Dongguo 鄭洞國

Zheng Shi 鄭實

Zheng Zhong 鄭中

*zhengzhi* 正直 upright

*Zhenxinghe* 振興合

*zhishu xiongyi, zuopin* “taowang” 直抒胸臆, 作品“逃亡” straightforward expres-  
sion of thoughts, [and so] the writing “escapes”

*Zhongguo shuidian zhi mu* 中国水电之母 Mother of China's hydropower

Zhou Ruchang 周汝昌

Zhou Tuimi 週退密

Zhu 朱

Zhu Ti 朱媿

Zi Jing 紫荊

Zou Haiying 邹海赢

Zuo Di 左蒂

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