The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature

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Yu Dafu

(1896–1945)

Sinking

Translated by Joseph S. M. Lau and C. T. Hsia

1

Lately he had been feeling pitifully lonesome.

His emotional precocity had placed him at constant odds with his fellow men, and inevitably the wall separating him from them had gradually grown thicker and thicker.

The weather had been cooling off day by day, and it had been almost two weeks since his school started.

It was September 22d that day. The sky was one patch of cloudless blue; the bright sun, timeless and eternal, was still making its daily circuit on its familiar track. A gentle breeze from the south, fragrant as nectar, brushed against his face. Amidst the half-ripened rice fields or on the meandering highways of the countryside he was seen strolling with a pocket edition of Wordsworth. On this great plain not a single soul was near, but then a dog's barking was heard, softened and rendered melodious by distance. He lifted his eyes from the book and, glancing in the direction of the barking, saw a cluster of trees and a few houses. The tiles on their roofs glittered like fish scales, and above them floated a thin layer of mist like a dancing ribbon of gossamer, *"Oh, you serene gossamer! you beautiful gossamer!"* [1] he exclaimed, and for reasons unknown even to himself his eyes were suddenly filled with tears.

After watching the scene absently for a while, he caught from behind him a whiff suggestive of violets. A little herbaceous plant, rustling in the breeze, had sent forth this scent and broken his dreamy spell. He turned around: the

1. Italicized common words, phrases, and sentences in this translation appear in Western languages in the original.

plant was still quivering, and the gentle breeze dense with the fragrance of violets blew on his pallid face. In this crisp, early autumn weather, in this bright and pellucid *ether*, his body felt soothed and languid as if under a mild intoxication. He felt as if he were sleeping in the lap of a kind mother, or being transported to the Peach Blossom Spring in a dream,[2] or else reclining his head on the knees of his beloved for an afternoon nap on the coast of southern Europe.

Looking around, he felt that every tree and every plant was smiling at him. Turning his gaze to the azure sky, he felt that Nature herself, timeless and eternal, was nodding to him in greeting. And after staring at the sky fixedly for a while, he seemed to see a group of little winged angels, with bows and arrows on their shoulders, dancing up in the air. He was overjoyed and could not help soliloquizing:

"This, then, is your refuge. When all the philistines envy you, sneer at you, and treat you like a fool, only Nature, only this eternally bright sun and azure sky, this late summer breeze, this early autumn air still remains your friend, still remains your mother and your beloved. With this, you have no further need to join the world of the shallow and flippant. You might as well spend the rest of your life in this simple countryside, in the bosom of Nature."

Talking in this fashion, he began to pity himself, as if a thousand sorrows and grievances finding no immediate expression were weighing upon his heart. He redirected his tearful eyes to the book:

> Behold her, single in the field,
> You solitary Highland Lass!
> Reaping and singing by herself;
> Stop here, or gently pass!
> Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
> And sings a melancholy strain;
> O listen! for the Vale profound
> Is overflowing with the sound.

After reading through the first stanza, for no apparent reason he turned the page and started on the third:

> Will no one tell me what she sings?
> Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
> For old, unhappy, far-off things,
> And battles long ago:
> Or is it some more humble lay,
> Familiar matter of today?

2. An utopia depicted by the poet Tao Qian (365–427) in his poem "Peach Blossom Spring" and its more famous preface.

Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again?

It had been his recent habit to read out of sequence. With books over a few hundred pages, it was only natural that he seldom had the patience to finish them. But even with the slender volumes like Emerson's *Nature* or Thoreau's *Excursions,* he never bothered to read them from beginning to end at one sitting. Most of the time, when he picked up a book, he would be so moved by its opening lines or first two pages that he literally wanted to swallow the whole volume. But after three or four pages, he would want to savor it slowly and would say to himself: "I mustn't gulp down such a marvelous book at one sitting. Instead, I should chew it over a period of time. For my enthusiasm for the book will be gone the moment I am through with it. So will my expectation and dreams, and won't that be a crime?"

Every time he closed a book, he made up similar excuses for himself. The real reason was that he had already grown a little tired of it. However, a few days or even a few hours later he would pick up another book and begin to read it with the same kind of enthusiasm. And naturally the one that had touched him so much a few hours or days earlier would now be forgotten.

He raised his voice and read aloud once more these two stanzas of Wordsworth. Suddenly it occurred to him that he should render "The Solitary Reaper" in Chinese.[3]

After orally translating these two stanzas in one breath, he suddenly felt that he had done something silly and started to reproach himself: "What kind of a translation is that? Isn't it as insipid as the hymns sung in the church? English poetry is English poetry and Chinese poetry is Chinese poetry; why bother to translate?"

After saying this, unwittingly he smiled a little. Somewhat to his surprise, as he looked around him, the sun was already on its way down. On the western horizon across the great plain floated a tall mountain wrapped in its mists, which, saturated with the setting sun, showed a color neither quite purple nor quite red.

While he was standing there in a daze, a cough from behind his back signaled the arrival of a peasant. He turned around and immediately assumed a melancholy expression, as if afraid to show his smile before strangers.

2.

His melancholy was getting worse with time.

To him the school textbooks were as insipid-tasting as wax, dull and lifeless. On sunny days he would take along a favorite work of literature and escape to a secluded place on the mountain or by the sea to relish to the full

3. Yu Dafu's translation of the two stanzas is omitted here.

the joy of solitude. When all was silent about him at a place where sky and water met, he would now regard the plants, insects, and fish around him and now gaze at the white clouds and blue sky and feel as if he were a sage or hermit who had proudly detached himself from the world. Sometimes, when he ran into a peasant in the mountain, he would imagine himself Zarathustra and would repeat Zarathustra's sayings before the peasant. His *megalomania*, in exact proportion to his *hypochondria*, was thus intensified each day. Small wonder that, in such a mood, he didn't feel like going to school and applying himself to the mechanical work. Sometimes he would skip classes for four or five days in a row.

And when he was in school he always had the feeling that everyone was staring at him. He made every effort to dodge his fellow students, but wherever he went, he just couldn't shake off that uncomfortable suspicion that their malevolent gazes were still fixed on him.

When he attended classes, even though he was in the midst of all his classmates, he always felt lonely, and the kind of solitude he felt in a press of people was more unbearable by far than the kind he experienced when alone. Looking around, he always found his fellow students engrossed in the instructor's lecture; only he, despite his physical presence in the classroom, was wandering far and wide in a state of reverie.

At long last the bell rang. After the instructor had left, all his classmates were as lively and high-spirited as swallows newly returned in spring—chatting, joking, and laughing. Only he kept his brows knit and uttered not a sound, as if his tongue were tethered to a thousand-ton rock. He would have liked to chat with his fellow students but, perhaps discouraged by his sorrowful countenance, they all shunned his company and went their own ways in pursuit of pleasure. For this reason, his resentment toward them intensified.

"They are all Japanese, all my enemies. I'll have my revenge one day; I'll get even with them."

He would take comfort in this thought whenever he felt miserable. But in a better mood, he would reproach himself: "They are Japanese, and of course they don't have any sympathy for you. It's because you want their sympathy that you have grown to hate them. Isn't this your own mistake?"

Among his more sympathetic fellow students some did approach him, intending to start a conversation. But although he was very grateful and would have liked to open his heart to them, in the end he wouldn't say anything. As a result, even they respected his wishes and kept away from him.

Whenever his Japanese schoolmates laughed and joked in his presence, his face would redden because he thought the laughter and jokes were at his expense. He would also flush if, while conversing, one of these students glanced at him. Thus, the distance between him and his schoolmates became greater each day. They all thought him a loner and avoided his presence.

One day after school he was walking back to his inn, satchel in hand. Alongside him were three Japanese students heading in the same direction. Just as he was about to reach the inn, there suddenly appeared before him two girl students in red skirts. His breathing quickened, for girl students were a rare sight in this rural area. As the two girls tried to get by, the three Japanese boys accosted them: "Where are you going?"

Coquettishly the two girls answered, "Don't know, don't know."

The three students all laughed, pleased with themselves. He alone hurried back to his inn, as if he had done the accosting. Once in his room, he dropped his satchel on the tatami floor and lay down for a rest (the Japanese sit as well as sleep on the tatami). His heart was still beating wildly. Placing one hand underneath his head and another on his chest, he cursed himself:

"*You coward fellow, you are too coward!* If you are so shy, what's there for you to regret? If you now regret your cowardice, why didn't you summon up enough courage to talk to the girls? *Oh coward, coward!*"

Suddenly he remembered their eyes, their bright and lively eyes. They had really seemed to register a note of happy surprise on seeing him. Second thoughts on the matter, however, prompted him to cry out:

"Oh, you fool! Even if they seemed interested, what are they to you? Isn't it quite clear that their ogling was intended for the three Japanese? Oh, the girls must have known! They must have known that I am a "Chinaman"; otherwise why didn't they even look at me once? Revenge! Revenge! I must seek revenge against their insult."

At this point in his monologue, a few icy teardrops rolled down his burning cheeks. He was in the utmost agony. That night, he put down in his diary:

"Why did I come to Japan? Why did I come here to pursue my studies? Since you have come, is it a wonder that the Japanese treat you with contempt? China, O my China! Why don't you grow rich and strong? I cannot bear your shame in silence any longer!

"Isn't the scenery in China as beautiful? Aren't the girls in China as pretty? Then why did I come to this island country in the eastern seas?

"And even if I accept the fact that I am here, there is no reason why I should have entered this cursed 'high school.'[4] Those who have returned to China after studying only five months here, aren't they now enjoying their success and prosperity? How can I bear the five or six years that still lie ahead of me? And how can I be sure that, even if I managed to finish my long years of studies despite the thousand vexations and hardships, I would be in any way better off than those so-called returned students who came here simply for fun?

"One may live to a hundred, but his youth lasts only seven or eight years.

4. A Japanese "high school" of the early modern period provided an education equivalent to the last two years of an American high school and the first two years of college.

What a pity that I should have to spend these purest and most beautiful seven or eight years in this unfeeling island country. And, alas, I am already twenty-one!

"Dead as dried wood at twenty-one!

"Dead as cold ashes at twenty-one!

"Far better for me to turn into some kind of mineral, for it's unlikely that I will ever bloom.

"I want neither knowledge nor fame. All I want is a 'heart' that can understand and comfort me, a warm and passionate heart and the sympathy that it generates and the love born of that sympathy!

"What I want is love.

"If there were one beautiful woman who understood my suffering, I would be willing to die for her.

"If there were one woman who could love me sincerely, I would also be willing to die for her, be she beautiful or ugly.

"For what I want is love from the opposite sex.

"O ye Heavens above, I want neither knowledge nor fame nor useless lucre. I shall be wholly content if you can grant me an Eve from the Garden of Eden, allowing me to possess her body and soul."

3

His home was in a small town on the Fuchun River, about eighty or ninety *li* from Hangzhou. The river originates in Anhui and wanders through the length of Zhejiang. Because it traverses a long tract of variegated landscape, a poet of the Tang dynasty wrote in admiration that "the whole river looks like a painting." When he was fourteen, he had asked one of his teachers to write down this line of four characters for him and had it pasted on the wall of his study. His study was not a big one, but since through its small window he could view the river in its ever-changing guises, rain and shine, morning and evening, spring and autumn, it had been to him as good as Prince Teng's tall pavilion.[5] And in this small study he had spent more than ten years before coming with his elder brother to Japan for study.

When he was three his father had passed away, leaving the family in severe poverty. His elder brother, however, managed to graduate from W. University in Japan, and upon his return to Beijing, he earned the *jinshi*[6] degree and was appointed to a position in the Ministry of Justice. But in less than two years the Republican revolution started in Wuchang. He himself

5. Celebrated in the Tang poet Wang Bo's lyrical prose composition, "The Pavilion of Prince Teng."

6. Refers to a successful candidate in the civil service examination system before the founding of the Republic of China. A *jinshi* is one who has passed the examination held in the imperial capital.

had by then finished grade school and was changing from one middle school to another. All his family reproved him for his restlessness and lack of perseverance. In his own view, however, he was different from other students and ought not to have studied the same prescribed courses through the same sequence of grades. Thus, in less than half a year, he transferred from the middle school in the city K. to one in H. where, unfortunately, he stayed less than three months owing to the outbreak of the revolution. Deprived of his schooling in the city H., he could only return to his own little study.

In the spring of the following year he was enrolled in the preparatory class for H. College on the outskirts of Hangzhou. He was then seventeen. Founded by the American Presbyterian Church, the college was notorious for its despotic administration and the minimal freedom it allowed its students. On Wednesday evenings they were required to attend vespers. On Sundays they were not allowed to go out or to read secular books—they could only pray, sing psalms, or read the Old and New Testaments. They were also required to attend chapel every morning from nine to nine twenty: the delinquent student would get demerits and lower grades. It was only natural that, as a lover of freedom, he chafed under such superstitious restrictions, fond as he was of the beautiful scenery around the campus. He had not yet been there half a year when a cook in the employ of the college, counting on the president's backing, went so far as to beat up students. Some of his more indignant schoolmates went to the president to complain, only to be told that they were in the wrong. Finding this and similar injustices altogether intolerable, he quit the school and returned to his own little study. It was then early June.

He had been home for more than three months when the autumn winds reached the Fuchun River and the leaves of the trees on its banks were about to fall. Then he took a junk down the river to go to Hangzhou where, he understood, the W. Middle School at the Stone Arch was then recruiting transfer students. He went to see the principal Mr. M. and his wife and told them of his experience at H. College. Mr. M. allowed him to enroll in the senior class.

It turned out, however, that this W. Middle School was also church-supported and that this Mr. M. was also a muddle-headed American missionary. And academically this school was not even comparable to the preparatory class at H. College. After a quarrel with the academic dean, a contemptible character and a graduate of H. College as well, he left W. Middle School in the spring. Since there was no other school in Hangzhou to his liking, he made no plans to be admitted elsewhere.

It was also at this time that his elder brother was forced to resign his position in Beijing. Being an upright man of strict probity and better educated than most of his colleagues in the ministry, he had invited their fear and envy. One day a personal friend of a certain vice-minister asked for a post

and he stubbornly refused to give him one; as a result, that vice-minister disagreed with him on certain matters, and in a few days he resigned his post to serve in the Judicial Yuan. His second elder brother was at that time an army officer stationed in Shaoxing. He was steeped in the habits of the military and therefore loved to squander money and associate with young gallants. Because these three brothers happened at the same time to be not doing too well, the idlers in their home town began to speculate whether their misfortune was of a geomantic nature.

After he had returned home, he shut himself in his study all day and sought guidance and companionship in the library of his grandfather, father, and elder brother. The number of poems he wrote in his diary began to grow. On occasions he also wrote stories in an ornate style featuring himself as a romantic knight-errant and the two daughters of the widow next door as children of nobility. Naturally the scenic descriptions in these stories were simply idyllic pictures of his home town. Sometimes, when the mood struck him, he would translate his own stories into some foreign language, employing the simple vocabulary at his command. In a word, he was more and more enveloped in a world of fantasy, and it was probably during this time that the seeds of his *hypochondria* were sown.

He stayed at home for six months. In the middle of July, however, he got a letter from his elder brother saying: "The Judicial Yuan has recently decided to send me to Japan to study its judicial system. My acceptance has already been forwarded to the minister and a formal appointment is expected in a few days. I will, however, go home first and stay for a while before leaving for Japan. Since I don't think idling at home will do you any good, this time I shall take you with me to Japan." This letter made him long for his brother's return, though he did not arrive from Beijing with his wife until the latter part of September. After a month's stay, they sailed with him for Japan.

Though he was not yet awakened from his *dreams of the romantic age,* upon his arrival in Tokyo, he nevertheless managed to pass the entrance examination for Tokyo's First High School after half a year. He would be in his nineteenth year in the fall.

When the First High School was about to open, his elder brother received word from the ministry that he should return. Thus his brother left him in the care of a Japanese family and a few days later returned with his wife and newborn daughter.

The First High School had set up a preparatory program especially for Chinese students so that upon completing that program in a year they could enroll along with the Japanese students in regular courses of study in the high school of their choice. When he first got into the program, his intended major was literature. Later, however, when he was about to complete the course, he changed to medicine, mainly under pressure from his brother but also because he didn't care much either way.

After completing his preparatory studies, he requested that he be sent to the high school in N. City, partly because he heard it was the newest such school in Japan and partly because N. City was noted for its beautiful women.

4

In the evening of August 29, in the twentieth year of his life, he took a night train all by himself from Tokyo's central station to N. City.

It was probably the third or fourth day of the seventh month in the old calendar. A sky the color of indigo velvet was studded with stars. The crescent moon, hooked in the western corner of the sky, looked like the untinted eyebrow of a celestial maiden. Sitting by the window in a third-class coach, he silently counted the lights in the houses outside. As the train steadily surged ahead through the black mists of the night, the lights of the great metropolis got dimmer and dimmer until they disappeared from his ken. Suddenly his heart was overtaken by a thousand melancholy thoughts, and his eyes were again moist with warm tears. *"Sentimental, too sentimental!"* he exclaimed. Then, drying his tears, he felt like mocking himself:

"You don't have a single sweetheart, brother, or close friend in Tokyo—so for whom are you shedding your tears? Perhaps grieving for your past life, or feeling sad because you have lived there for the last two years? But haven't you been saying you don't care for Tokyo?

"Oh, but how can one help being attached to a place even after living there for only one year?"

> The orioles know me well because I have long lived here;
> When I am getting ready to leave, they keep crying, four or five sad notes at a time.[7]

Then his rambling thoughts turned to the first Puritans embarking for America: "I imagine that those cross-bearing expatriates were no less grief-stricken than I am now when sailing off the coast of their old country."

The train had now passed Yokohama, and his emotions began to quiet down. After collecting himself for a while, he placed a postcard on top of a volume of Heine's poetry and with a pencil composed a poem intended for a friend in Tokyo:

> The crescent barely rising above the willows,
> I again left home for a distant horizon,
> First pausing in a roadside tavern crowded with revelers,
> Then taking off in a carriage as the street lights receded.

7. A couplet from a quatrain by the Tang poet Rong Yu, entitled "Bidding Goodbye to the Pavilion on the Lake on the Occasion of Moving My Home." The translators are indebted to Professor Chiang Yee for this identification.

A youth inured to partings and sorrows has few tears to shed;
The luggage from a poor home consists only of old books.
At night the reeds find their roots stirred by autumn waters—
May you get my message at South Bank!

Then after resting for a while, he read some of Heine's poetry under a dim light bulb:

Lebet wohl, ihr glatten Säle,
Glatte Herren, glatte Frauen!
Auf die Berge will ich steigen,
Lachend auf euch niederschauen![8]

But with the monotonous sound of the wheels pounding against his eardrums, in less than thirty minutes he was transported into a land of dreams. At five o'clock dawn began to break. Peering through the window, he was able to discern a thread of blue making its way out of the nocturnal darkness. He then stuck his head out the window and saw a picturesque scene wrapped in haze. "So it's going to be another day of nice autumn weather," he thought. "How fortunate I am!"

An hour later the train arrived at N. City's railroad station. Alighting from the train, he saw at the station a Japanese youth wearing a cap marked by two white stripes and knew him for a student of the high school. He walked toward him and, lifting his cap slightly, asked, "How do I find the X. High School?" The student answered, "Let's go there together." So with the student he left the station and took a trolley in front of its entrance.

The morning was still young, and shops in N. City were not yet open. After passing through several desolate streets, they got off in front of the Crane Dance Park.

"Is the school far from here?" he asked.

"About two *li*."

The sun had risen by the time they were walking the narrow path between the rice fields after crossing the park, but the dewdrops were still on the rice stalks, bright as pearls. Across the fields in front were clusters of trees shading some scattered farmhouses. Two or three chimneys rising above these structures seemed to float in the early morning air, and bluish smoke

8. "You polished halls, polished men. / Polished women—to all adieu! / I'm off to climb in the mountains, / And smiling to look down on you!" These lines form the last stanza of the Prologue to Heine's "Harzreise" (Travels through the Harz Mountains). See Heinrich Heine, *Werke*, ed. Martin Greiner (Cologne and Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1962), pp. 767–824. The poem is a satire in the form of a travel diary written in late 1824, criticizing the superficial policy of polite society, which Heine's narrator longs to abandon for the simple life in the mountains. The translators are grateful to William Nienhauser for translating this poem.

emanating from them curled in the sky like incense. He knew that the farmers were preparing breakfast.

He inquired at an inn close to the school and was informed that the few pieces of luggage sent out the previous week had already arrived. The innkeeper, used to Chinese lodgers, gave him a hearty welcome. After unpacking, he had the feeling that the days ahead promised much joy and pleasure.

But all his hopes for the future were mocked by reality that very evening. His home town, however small, was a busy little town, and while he had often felt lonely amid large throngs in Tokyo, nevertheless the kind of city life there was not too different from what he had been accustomed to since childhood. Now this inn, situated in the countryside of N. City, was far too isolated. To the left of its front door was a narrow path cutting across the rice fields; only a square pond to the west of the inn provided some diversity to the scene. Since school had not yet begun, students had not yet returned, and thus he was the only guest in this spacious hostel. It was still not too unbearable in the day, but that evening, when he pushed open the window to look out, everywhere was pitch darkness. For the countryside of N. City was a large plain, with nothing to obstruct one's view. A few lights were visible in the distance, now bright and now dim, lending to the view a spectral quality. Up above the ceiling he could hear the scampering rats fighting for food, while outside the window several *wutong* trees would rustle whenever there was a breeze. Because his room was on the second floor, the rattle of the leaves sounded so close that he was frightened almost to the point of tears. He had never felt a stronger nostalgia than on that evening.

He got to know more people after school started, and his extremely sensitive nature also became adapted to the pastoral environment. In less than three months he had become Nature's child, no longer separable from the pleasures of the countryside.

His school was located on the outskirts of N. City, which, as has already been mentioned, were nothing but open fields offering an unobstructed vision of broad horizons. At that time Japan was not so industrialized or populous as it is now. Hence this large area of open space around the school, diversified only by clumps of trees and little knolls and mounds. Except for a few stationery shops and restaurants serving the needs of the students, there were no stores in the neighborhood. A few inns, however, dotted the cultivated fields in this mainly untilled wilderness. After supper he would put on his black serge cloak and, a favorite book in hand, take a walk in the lingering glow of the setting sun. Most probably it was during these *idyllic wanderings* that he developed his passion for nature.

So at a time when competition was not as keen as today and leisure was as plentiful as in the Middle Ages, he spent half a year of dreamlike existence in

a quiet retreat, simple in its manners and uncontaminated by the presence of philistines. These happy days and months seemed to go by in a flash.

The weather was now getting milder, and the grass was turning green under the influence of warm breezes. The young shoots in the wheat fields near the inn were growing taller inch by inch. With all nature responding to the call of spring, he too felt more keenly the urge implanted in him by the progenitors of the human race. Unflaggingly, he would sin every morning underneath his quilt.

He was ordinarily a very self-respecting and clean person, but when evil thoughts seized hold of him, numbing his intellect and paralyzing his conscience, he was no longer able to observe the admonition that "one must not harm one's body under any circumstances, since it is inherited from one's parents."[9] Every time he sinned he felt bitter remorse and vowed not to transgress again. But, almost without exception, the same visions appeared before him vividly, at the same time the next morning. All those descendants of Eve he would normally meet in the course of the day came to seduce him in all their nakedness, and the figure of a middle-aged *madam* appeared to him even more tempting than that of a virgin. Inevitably, after a hard struggle, he succumbed to temptation. Thus once, twice, and this practice became a habit. Quite often, after abusing himself, he would go to the library to look up medical references on the subject. They all said without exception that this practice was most harmful to one's health. After that his fear increased.

One day he learned somewhere in a book that Gogol, the founder of modern Russian literature, had also suffered from this sickness and was not able to cure himself to the day of his death. This discovery comforted him somewhat, if only because no less a man than the author of *Dead Souls* was his fellow sinner. But this form of self-deception could do little to remove the worry in his heart.

Since he was very much concerned about his health, he now took a bath and had milk and several raw eggs every day. But he couldn't help feeling ashamed of himself when taking his bath or having his milk and eggs: all this was clear evidence of his sin.

He felt that his health was declining day by day and his memory weakening. He became shy and especially uncomfortable in the presence of women. He grew to loathe textbooks and turned increasingly to French naturalistic novels as well as a few Chinese novels noted for their pornography. These he now read and reread so many times that he could almost recite them from memory.

On the infrequent occasions when he turned out a good poem he became overjoyed, believing that his brain had not yet been damaged. He would then

9. From *The Book on Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing*), an early Confucian classic.

swear to himself: "My brain is all right, since I can still compose such a good poem. I mustn't do that sort of thing again. The past I can no longer help, but I shall control myself in the future. If I don't sin again, my brain will be in good shape." But when that critical moment came each morning, he again forgot his own words.

On every Thursday and Friday or on the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh of each month he abandoned himself to this pleasure without a qualm, for he thought that he would be able to stop by next Monday or next month. Sometimes when he happened to have a haircut or a bath on a Saturday evening or the evening of the last day of the month, he would take that as a sign of his reformation. But only a few days later he would have to resume his diet of milk and eggs.

Hardly a day passed in which he was not troubled by his own fears as well as by his sense of guilt, and his hypochondria worsened. He remained in such a condition for about two months, and then the summer vacation began. However, he suffered even worse during the two-month vacation than before: for by the time school resumed, his cheekbones had become more prominent, the bluish-gray circles around his eyes even bigger, and his once-bright pupils as expressionless as those of a dead fish.

5

Again it was fall. The big blue firmament seemed to be suspended higher and higher each day. The rice fields around his inn had now turned the color of gold. When the chilly winds of morning or evening cut into his skin like a dagger, he knew that bright autumn days were not far behind.

The week before, he had taken along a volume of Wordsworth and strolled on the paths in the fields for a whole afternoon. From that day on he had not been able to free himself from the spell of his cyclic hypochondria. Moreover, the two girl students he had met a few days before stayed in his memory and he couldn't help blushing whenever he recalled that encounter.

Recently, wherever he went, he was uneasy. At school he had the feeling that his Japanese classmates were avoiding him. And he no longer wanted to visit his Chinese classmates simply because after each such visit his heart felt all the more empty. Those Chinese friends of his, hard as they tried, still couldn't understand his state of mind. Before each visit he expected to win their sympathy, but as it happened, no sooner had they exchanged a few words than he began to regret his visit. There was one, however, whose conversation he enjoyed, and sometimes he told him all about his private and public life. On his way home, however, he always regretted having talked so much and ended up in a worse state of self-reproach than before. For this reason a rumor circulated among his Chinese friends that he was mentally ill. When the rumor reached him, he wanted as much to avenge himself on these

few Chinese friends as on his Japanese schoolmates. He was finally so alienated from the Chinese that he wouldn't even greet them when he met them in the street or on the campus. Naturally he didn't attend any of the meetings for Chinese students, so that he and they became virtual enemies.

Among these Chinese students there was one eccentric. Probably because there was something reprehensible about his marriage, he seemed to take particular delight in malicious gossip—partly as a means of covering up his own immoral conduct. And it was none other than this eccentric who had spread the rumor that he was mentally ill.

His loneliness became most intolerable after he had cut himself off from all social contacts. Fortunately, the innkeeper's daughter held some attraction for him, for otherwise he could really have committed suicide. She was just seventeen and had an oblong face and big eyes. Whenever she smiled, she showed two dimples and one gold tooth, and quite often she put a smile on her face, confident of its charm.

Although he was very fond of her, when she came in to make his bed or deliver his meals he always put on an air of aloofness. And however badly he wanted to talk to her, he never did because he could hardly breathe in front of her. To avoid this insufferable agony, he had lately tried to leave his room as soon as she entered it. But the more he tried to avoid her, the more he longed for her.

One Saturday evening all the other students in the inn had gone to N. City to amuse themselves. For economic reasons he didn't go there. He returned to his room following a brief after-dinner stroll around the pond on the west side. But it was difficult for him to stay by himself on the deserted second floor, and soon he got impatient and wanted to go out again. To leave the place, however, meant passing the door of the innkeeper's own room, which was situated right by the main entrance, and he remembered when he returned that the innkeeper and his daughter were just having dinner. At this thought he no longer had the desire to go out again, since seeing her would mean another torturing experience.

Instead, he took out a novel by George Gissing and started to read; but before he had finished three or four pages, he heard, in the dead silence, the splashing of water. He held his breath and listened for a while, and soon he started panting, and his face turned red. After some moments of hesitation, he pushed open the door quietly and, taking off his slippers, went down the stairs stealthily. With equal caution he pushed open the door to the toilet and stood by its glass window to peer into the bathroom (the bathroom was adjacent to the toilet; through the glass window one could see the goings-on in the bathroom). At first he thought he would be content with just a glance. But what he saw in the next room kept him completely nailed down.

Those snow-white breasts! Those voluptuous thighs! And that curvaceous figure!

Holding his breath, he took another close look at the girl and a muscle in his face began to twitch. Finally he became so overwrought that his forehead hit the windowpane. The naked Eve then asked across the steam, "Who is it?" Without making a sound, he hurriedly left the toilet and rushed upstairs.

Back in his room he felt his face burning and his mouth parched. To punish himself, he kept slapping his own face while taking out the bedding to get ready for sleep. But he could hardly fall asleep. After tossing and turning under the quilt for a while, he strained his ears and concentrated all his attention on the movements downstairs. The splashing had stopped, and he heard the bathroom door open. And judging by the sound of her footsteps, he was positive she was coming upstairs. Immediately he buried his head beneath the quilt and listened to the whisper of his inner voice: "She's already outside the door." He felt as if all his blood were rushing to his head. Certainly he was now in a state of unusual excitement, compounded of fear, shame, and joy, but if someone had asked him at that moment, he would have denied that he was filled with joy.

Holding his breath, he strained his ears and listened—all was quiet on the other side of the door. He coughed deliberately—still no response. But just as he was getting puzzled, he heard her voice downstairs talking with her father. Hard as he tried (he was so tense that his palms were soaked in sweat), he still couldn't make out anything she was saying. Presently her father roared with laughter. Burying his head under the quilt, he said through clenched teeth, "So she's told him! She's told him!"

He didn't get a wink of sleep that night. Early the next morning he stole downstairs to make a quick toilet and rushed out of the inn. It was not yet time for the innkeeper and his daughter to get up.

The sun was rising, but the dew-drenched dust on the road had not yet dried. Without knowing exactly where to go, he headed east and before long saw a peasant pushing a vegetable cart coming his way. "Good morning," the peasant greeted him as their shoulders brushed. This took him by surprise, and immediately his emaciated face flushed red. He wondered, "So he also knows my secret?"

After walking hurriedly with no sense of direction for a long while, he turned his head and saw that he was already a great distance from his school. The sun had now risen. He wanted to determine the time but could not do so, since he had forgotten to take his silver pocket watch along. Judging by the position of the sun, it was probably about nine o'clock. He was hungry, but unwilling to go back and face the innkeeper and his daughter, though all he had on him was twelve cents, hardly enough for a decent snack. Finally he bought from a village grocery store twelve cents' worth of food, intending to eat it in a nook, unseen by others.

He kept walking until he reached a crossroads. There were very few pedestrians on the side path running from north to south. Since the south

side sloped downward, flanked by two precipices, he knew that the path had been dug out of a hill. Thus the crossroads was the tip of the hill, while the main path on which he had been walking was its ridge and the intersecting side path sloped in two directions, following the hill's contour. He paused at the crossroads for a while and then came upon a large plain that he knew would lead to the city.

Across the plain was a dense grove where, he thought, the A. Shinto Temple was located. When he had reached the end of the path, he saw that there stood upon its left bank a parapet encircling a few cottages. Above the door of one of these cottages hung a tablet inscribed with three Chinese characters, *xiang xue hai* (sea of fragrant snow).[10] He walked up a few steps to the entrance of the parapet and with one push opened both sides of the door. Stepping casually inside, he found a winding path leading uphill flanked by a great many old *mei* trees and knew for sure that this was a *mei* grove. He walked up the northern slope along this winding path until he reached the hilltop, where he saw stretching before him a plateau of great scenic beauty. From the foot of the hill to the plateau, the whole grove covering the surface of the slope was most tastefully planned.

West of the plateau was the precipice, which faced another across the gulf, and down below was the narrow pathway he had just traversed. Aligned on the edge of this precipice were a two-story house and several cottages. Since all their doors and windows were tightly shut, he knew that they were restaurants and taverns, open only during the season of the *mei* blossoms. In front of the two-story house was a lawn with a ring of white rocks at its center, and inside the ring an old *mei* tree crouched on its gnarled trunk. At the outer edge of the lawn marking the beginning of the southern slope stood a stone tablet recording the history of the grove. He sat on the grass in front of the tablet and started eating the food he had bought in the grocery store.

He sat on the lawn for a while even after he had finished breakfast. There were no human voices; only from the trees in the farther distance came the occasional chirping of birds. Gazing at the azure sky, he felt that everything around him—the trees and houses, the lawn and birds—was being equally nourished by Nature, under the benign influence of the sun. In face of all this, his memory of last night's sin vanished like a boat sailing beyond the outer rim of the sea.

From the plateau to the end of the downhill slope there were many little winding paths. He got up and walked randomly among these until he came to a cottage situated midway down the slope, surrounded by *mei* trees. Nearby on the east side was an ancient well covered with a heap of pine needles. He turned the handle of the pump several times trying to draw some water, but the machine only creaked and no water came up. He thought, "Probably this

10. A traditional metaphor for a grove of *mei* or Japanese apricot trees.

grove is open only during the flowering season. No wonder there's no one around." Then he murmured as another thought flashed upon him, "Since the grove is unoccupied, why don't I go and ask the owner if I could lodge here for a while?"

This decided, he rushed downhill to look for the owner. As he came near the entrance, he ran into a peasant around fifty years of age coming into the grove. He apologized and then inquired, "Do you know who owns this place?"

"It's under my management."

"Where do you live?"

"Over there." The peasant pointed to a little house on the west side of the main path. Following his direction, he saw the house on the far end of the western precipice and nodded to acknowledge its existence. Then he asked, "Can you rent me that two-story house inside the grove?"

"Sure. But are you by yourself?"

"Yes."

"Then you might as well save yourself the trouble."

"Why?"

"Because I have had student tenants before, and they hardly stayed more than ten days before they moved out, probably because they couldn't stand the solitude."

"I'm quite different from the others. I won't mind the solitude as long as you agree to rent the place to me."

"I can't think of any reason why not. When do you want to move in?"

"How about this afternoon?"

"It's all right with me."

"Then may I trouble you to clean it up before I move in?"

"Certainly, certainly. Goodbye!"

"Goodbye."

6

After he had moved to the *mei* grove, his *hypochondria* took a different turn.

Over some trivial matters he had started a quarrel with his elder brother, which prompted him to mail to Beijing a long, long letter severing ties of kinship. But after that letter was sent, he mused for many an hour in front of his house. He thought he was the most miserable man in the world. Actually, he was the one to blame for this fraternal split, but precisely because a quarrel of this sort is usually more bitter than a quarrel among friends, he hated his brother like a viper or scorpion. When he was humiliated, he would reason thus: "If even my own brother could be so unkind to me, how can I blame

others?" After reaching this conclusion, he would review all the unkind things that he imagined his brother had done to him and declare that his brother was bad and he himself was good. He would then itemize his own virtues and list all his past wrongs and sufferings in an exaggerated fashion. When he had proved to his own satisfaction that he was indeed the most miserable of all men, his tears would course down like a waterfall. A soft voice would seem to be speaking to him from the sky, "Oh, so it's you who are crying. It's really a shame that such a kindhearted person as you should be so maltreated by the world. But let it be, since it has been decreed by Heaven, and you'd better stop crying, since it won't do your health any good." When he heard this voice, he would feel greatly relieved: there seemed to be infinite sweetness in chewing the cud of bitter sorrow.

As a means of retaliation, he gave up his study of medicine and switched to literature, intending this change of major to be a declaration of war, since it was his brother who had urged him to study medicine. Also, changing his major would delay his graduation for a year, which meant shortening his life by one year, and the sooner he died, the easier it would be to maintain a lifelong enmity toward his brother. For he was quite afraid that he would be reconciled with his brother in a year or two, and he changed his major to help strengthen his sense of enmity.

The weather had gradually turned colder. It had been a month since he moved up the hill. In the past few days dark clouds had hung heavily in the somber sky, and when the frosty northern winds came, the leaves on the *mei* trees would begin to fall.

Upon moving to his retreat, he had sold some old books to buy cooking utensils and had made his own meals for nearly a month. Now that it was getting chillier, he gave up cooking and ate at the grove keeper's house down the hill. Like a retired monk idling in a temple, he had nothing to do but to blame others and reproach himself.

One morning he got up very early. Pushing open the window facing the east, he saw a few curls of red cloud floating on the far horizon. The sky directly above was a patch of reddish silver-gray. Because it had drizzled the day before, he found the rising sun all the more lovely. He went down the slope and fetched water from the ancient well. After washing his face and hands with the water, he felt full of energy and ran upstairs for a volume of Huang Zhongze's[11] poetry. He kept pacing along the winding paths in the grove as he chanted the poetry. Soon the sun was up in the sky.

Looking southward from the plateau, he could see, at the foot of the hill, a large plain checkered with rice fields. The unharvested grain, ripened to a

11. The famous Qing poet (1749–1783) is the hero of Yu Dafu's story, "Colored Rock Cliff."

yellowish gold, gave a most brilliant reflection of the morning sun against the background of a violet sky. The scene reminded him of a rural painting by Millet. Faced with this magnificence of Nature, he felt like an early Christian of Jesus' time and could not help laughing at his own pettiness:

"Forgive, forgive! I have forgiven all ye who have wronged me. Come ye all and make peace with me!"

As he was contemplating—with a book of poems in hand and tears in eyes—the beauty of the autumnal scene and thus getting lost in thought, all of a sudden he heard two whispering voices close by him:

"You have to come tonight!" It was clearly a man's voice.

"I want to very much, but I'm afraid . . ."

It was a girl's seductive voice, and he felt instantly electrified, as if his circulation had stopped. Looking around, he found himself standing by a growth of tall reeds. He was on its right and the couple was probably on its left, completely oblivious of his existence.

"You are so kind. Do come tonight, because so far we haven't . . . in bed," the man continued.

". . ."

He heard the noise made by their sucking lips, and immediately he prostrated himself on the ground, as stealthily as a wild dog with a stolen morsel in its mouth. "Oh, shame, shame!" he cursed himself severely in his heart, "How can you be so depraved!" Nevertheless, he was all ears, listening to what they were doing and saying.

The crunching of fallen leaves on the ground.

The noise of undressing.

The man's rapid panting.

The sucking of lips.

And the woman pleading in half-audible, broken tones: "Please . . . please . . . please hurry . . . otherwise we . . . we will be seen . . ."

Instantly his complexion turned ash-gray, his eyes reddened with fire, and his upper teeth clattered against his lower. He could hardly get up, let alone run away from the scene. He was transfixed in agony.

He waited there until the couple had left before he went back to his bedroom upstairs like a drenched dog and covered himself up with a quilt.

7

Without bothering with lunch, he slept until four o'clock—until the whole area was suffused with the late afternoon sun. In the distance a thin veil of smoke was seen floating leisurely on top of the trees across the plain. Hurriedly he ran downhill to get on the road and headed south for no apparent reason. He eventually crossed the plain to arrive at the trolley

stop in front of the A. Temple. A trolley came by just then and he boarded it, without knowing why he should be taking the trolley or where he was going.

After running for fifteen or sixteen minutes, the trolley stopped and the operator asked him to change cars. So he took another trolley. Twenty or thirty minutes later it reached its last stop, and so he got off. He found himself standing by a harbor.

In front of him was the sea, lazing in the afternoon sun, smiling. Across the sea to the south was the silhouette of a mountain floating hazily in translucent air. To the west was a long dike, stretching to the middle of the bay. A lighthouse stood beyond the dike like a giant. A few tethered boats and sampans were moving slightly, while a number of buoys farther out in the bay shone red on the water. The wind carried from a distance broken snatches of a conversation, but he was unable to tell what it was about or where it came from.

After pacing aimlessly for a while on the bank, he suddenly heard something that sounded like chimes. He went over and saw that the musical signal was designed to attract customers to the ferry. Soon a steamboat came by from the opposite side. Following a middle-aged worker, he too boarded the ferry.

No sooner had he landed on the eastern bank than he found himself in front of a villa. The door was wide open, showing a courtyard neatly decorated with a lawn, flowering plants, and miniature hills made of rocks. Without finding out the identity of the place, he simply walked in and was immediately greeted by a very sweet feminine voice: "Please come in."

Taken by surprise, he stood there in a daze and thought, "This is probably some kind of restaurant, but I have heard a place like this cannot be without prostitutes."

At the thought of this he became invigorated, as if drenched by a bucketful of cold water. But he soon changed color because he didn't know what to do with himself, whether to advance or retreat. It was a pity that he had the lust of an ape and the timidity of a rabbit, which accounted for his present quandary.

"Come in. Please do come in." That seductive voice called from the hall again, accompanied by giggles.

"You devils! You think I am too timid to come in?" he said to himself in anger, his face burning hot. Stamping his feet lightly, he advanced, gnashing his teeth and clenching his fists, as if preparing to declare war on these young waitresses. But hard as he tried, he couldn't possibly erase the flushes of red and blue on his face nor compose its twitching muscles. So when he came near these girls, he almost cried like a child.

"Please come upstairs!"

"Please come upstairs!"

Bracing himself, he followed a waitress of around seventeen or eighteen upstairs and felt somewhat calmer. A few steps on the second floor and he came into a dark corridor; immediately his nostrils were assaulted by a strange mixture of the perfume of face powder and hair tonic and the special kind of bodily fragrance that distinguished Japanese women. He felt dizzy and sparks floated before his eyes, which made him reel. After steadying himself, he saw emerging from the darkness in front of him the oblong, powdered face of a woman who asked him with a smile:

"Would you like to have a place by the sea? Or did you have a special place in mind?"

He felt the woman's warm breath upon his face and he inhaled deeply without being aware of what he was doing. But as soon as he became conscious of his action, his face reddened. With great effort he mumbled an answer:

"I'll take a room facing the sea."

After taking him to a small room by the sea, the waitress asked what kind of food he would like, and he answered:

"Just bring a few dishes of what you have ready."

"Want some wine?"

"Yes."

After the waitress had left, he stood up and pushed open the paper windows to let in some fresh air, for the room was stuffy and her perfumed presence lingered on, suffocating him.

The bay was calm. A light breeze passed by and the surface of the sea was wrinkled into a series of waves that, under the reflection of the setting sun, glinted like the scales of a golden fish.

After watching the scene from the window for a while, he was moved to whisper a line of poetry:

"The setting sun has crimsoned my seaside chamber."[12]

Looking westward, he saw that the sun was now only about ten feet from the horizon. But however beautiful the scene, his thoughts were still with the waitress—the fragrance emanating from her mouth, hair, face, and body. After repeated attempts to engage his mind elsewhere, he resigned himself to the fact that in his present mood he was obsessed with flesh rather than poetry.

Before long the waitress brought in his food and wine. She squatted by him and served him most attentively. He wanted to look closely at her and confide in her all his troubles. But in reality he didn't even dare look her in the eye, much less talk to her. And so, like a mute, all he did was look

12. Most probably this line of verse is Yu Dafu's own composition.

furtively at her delicate, white hands resting upon her knees and that portion of a pink petticoat not covered by her kimono.

For Japanese women wear a short petticoat instead of drawers. On the outside they wear a buttonless, long-sleeved kimono with a band about fourteen inches wide around the waist fastened into a square bundle on the back. Because of this costume, with every step they take, the kimono is flung open to reveal the pink petticoat inside and a glimpse of plump thighs. This is the special charm of Japanese women to which he paid most attention whenever he saw them on the street. It was because of this habit too that he called himself a beast, a sneaky dog, and a despicable coward.

It was specifically the corner of the waitress's petticoat that was perturbing him now. The more he wanted to talk to her, the more tongue-tied he became. His embarrassment was apparently making the waitress a little impatient, for she asked, "Where are you from?"

At this, his pallid face reddened again; he stammered and stammered but couldn't give a forthright answer. He was once again standing on the guillotine. For the Japanese look down upon Chinese just as we look down upon pigs and dogs. They call us Shinajin, "Chinamen," a term more derogatory than "knave" in Chinese. And now he had to confess before this pretty young girl that he was a Shinajin.

"O China, my China, why don't you grow strong!"

His body was trembling convulsively and tears were again about to roll down.

Seeing him in such agitation, the waitress thought it would be best to leave him to drink alone, so that he could compose himself. So she said:

"You have almost finished this bottle. I'll get you another one."

In a while he heard the waitress coming upstairs. He thought she was coming back to him, and so he changed his sitting position and adjusted his clothes. But he was deceived, for she was only taking some other guests to the room next to his.

Soon he heard the guests flirting with the waitress, who said coquettishly, "Please behave. We have a guest in the next room." This infuriated him, and he cursed them silently:

"Bastards! Pigs! How dare you bully me like this? Revenge! Revenge! I'll revenge myself on you! Can there be any true-hearted girl in the world? You faithless waitress, how dare you desert me like this? Oh, let it be, let it be, for from now on I shall care nothing about women, absolutely nothing. I will love nothing but my country, and let my country be my love."

He had an impulse to go home and apply himself to study. At the same time, however, he was envious of those bastards next door, and there was still a secret corner in his heart that expected the waitress's return.

Finally, he suppressed his anger and silently downed a few cups of wine,

which made him feel warm all over. He got up and opened some more windows to cool himself, and saw that the sun was now going down. Then he drank a few more cups and watched the gradual blurring of the seascape. The shadow cast by the lighthouse on the dike was getting longer and longer, and a descending fog began to blend the sky and the sea. But behind this hazy veil the setting sun lingered on the horizon, as if reluctant to say goodbye. After watching this view for a while, he felt inexplicably merry and burst out laughing. He rubbed his burning cheeks, muttering, "Yes, I'm drunk. I'm drunk."

The waitress finally came in. Seeing him flushing and laughing idiotically in front of the windows, she asked:

"With the windows wide open, aren't you afraid of the cold?"

"I'm not cold, not cold at all. Who can afford to miss this beautiful sunset?"

"You're indeed a poet. Here is your wine."

"Poet? Yes, I'm a poet. Bring me a brush and some paper and I'll write a poem for you."

After the waitress had left, he was surprised at himself and thought, "How have I become so bold all of a sudden?"

He became even merrier after emptying more cups of the newly warmed wine and broke into another round of loud laughter. In the next room those bastards were singing Japanese songs aloud, and so he also raised his voice and chanted:

> Drunk, I tap the railing and feel the chillier because of the wine;
> Rivers and lakes again turn bleak in the death of winter.
> The mad poet with his profound pity for the parrot
> Was spared through death—his bones buried in the Central Province;
> The further ignominy of another talented youth
> Exiled to Chang'an with the title of grand tutor.
> It's not too hard to try to repay a life-saving meal
> With a thousand pieces of gold,
> But how many could pass through the capital
> Without heaving five long sighs?
> Looking homeward across the misted sea,
> I too weep for my beloved country.[13]

13. Like the earlier poem intended for a friend in Tokyo, this poem is Yu Dafu's own composition in the eight-line, seven-character *lüshi* style. The editors have expanded its second and third couplets into eight lines (lines 3–10) because otherwise these highly allusive couplets would not have made much sense to the general reader. The "mad poet" of line 3 is Ni Heng, a precocious and utterly proud scholar of the Later Han dynasty who once wrote a *fu* poem on the parrot, indirectly comparing himself to this bird of supernal intelligence forced to live in captivity. At the age of twenty-six he was executed by Huang Zu, governor of Jiangxia (Central

8

When he woke up, he found himself lying underneath a red satin quilt scented with a strange perfume. The room was not large, but it was no longer the same room he had occupied in the late afternoon. A ten-watt bulb suspended from the ceiling gave a dim light. A teapot and two cups were placed beside his pillow. After helping himself to two or three cups of tea, he got up and walked unsteadily to the door. As he was opening it, the same waitress who had taken care of him in the afternoon came in to greet him: "Hey, there! Are you all right now?"

He nodded and answered with a smile, "Yes. Where is the toilet?"

"I'll show you."

He followed her and again passed through the corridor, but it was now lit up and from far and near came singing and laughter and the sound of the *samisen*. All this helped him to recall what had happened this afternoon, especially what he had said to the waitress when in a drunken state. His face flushed again.

Returning from the toilet, he asked the waitress, "Is this quilt yours?"

"Yes," she answered with a smile.

"What time is it now?"

"It's probably eight forty or eight fifty."

"Would you please give me the check?"

"Yes, sir."

After he had paid the bill, tremblingly he handed the waitress a banknote, but she said, "No, thanks. I don't need it."

He knew she was offended by the small tip. Again red with embarrassment, he searched his pocket and found one remaining note. He gave it to her, saying, "I hope you won't scorn this paltry sum. Please take it."

His hand trembled more violently this time, and even his voice quivered. Seeing him in this state, the waitress accepted the money and said in a low voice, "Thank you." He ran straight downstairs, put on his shoes, and went outside.

Province), one of the several patrons he had offended with his rude arrogance. "Another talented youth," in line 5, refers to Jia Yi, a Former Han writer of greater fame. His hopes for a political career were dashed when he was assigned, or rather banished, to the state of Changsha to serve as its king's tutor. A few years later he died heartbroken at the age of thirty-three. Han Xin, a prominent general under the founding emperor of the Former Han dynasty, was befriended in his youth by a washerwoman who repeatedly gave him meals when he had nothing to eat. After he had achieved fame, he sought her out and gave her "a thousand pieces of gold" (line 8). Liang Hong, a recluse of the Later Han, once passed through the national capital and composed a "Song of Five Sighs," each of its five lines ending with the exclamatory word *yi* (alas!). Emperor Suzong was highly displeased, and Liang Hong had to change his name and live in hiding.

The night air was very cold. It was probably the eighth or ninth of the lunar month, and the half moon hung high in the left corner of the grayish-blue sky, accompanied by a few lone stars.

He took a walk by the seashore. From afar the lights on the fishermen's boats seemed to be beckoning him, like the will-o'-the-wisp, and the waves under the silvery moonlight seemed to be winking at him like the eyes of mountain spirits.[14] Suddenly he had an inexplicable urge to drown himself in the sea.

He felt in his pocket and found that he didn't even have money for the trolley fare. Reflecting upon what he had done today, he couldn't help cursing himself:

"How could I have gone to such a place? I really have become a most degraded person. But it's too late for regrets. I may as well end my life here, since I'll probably never get the kind of love I want. And what would life be without love? Isn't it as dead as ashes? Ah, this dreary life, how dull and dry! Everyone in this world hates me, mistreats me—even my own brother is trying to push me off the edge of this world. How can I make a living? And why should I stay on in this world of suffering?"

This thought gave him pause, and tears began to roll down his face, which was now as pallid as a dead man's. He didn't even bother to wipe away the tears, which glistened on his moon-blanched face like the morning dew on the leaves. With anguish he turned his head to look at the elongated shadow of his thin body.

"My poor shadow! You have followed me for twenty-one years, and now this sea is going to bury you. Though my body has been insulted and injured, I should not have let you grow so thin and frail. O shadow, my shadow, please forgive me!"

He looked toward the west. The light on the lighthouse was doing its job, now beaming red and now green. When the green beam reached down, there would immediately appear on the sea an illuminated path of light blue. Again looking up, he saw a bright star trembling in the farthest reaches of the western horizon.

"Underneath that shaky star lies my country, my birthplace, where I have spent eighteen years of my life. But alas, my homeland, I shall see you no more!"

Such were his despondent, self-pitying thoughts as he walked back and forth along the shore. After a while, he paused to look again at that bright star in the western sky, and tears poured down like a shower. The view

14. In using the term *shangui* (mountain spirits), the author must be alluding to the female deity of identical name celebrated in one of the "Nine Songs" (*Jiuge*). See David Hawkes, trans., *Ch'u Tz'u: The Songs of the South* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), p. 43.

around him began to blur. Drying his tears, he stood still and uttered a long sigh. Then he said, between pauses:

"O China, my China, you are the cause of my death! . . . I wish you could become rich and strong soon! . . . Many, many of your children are still suffering."

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