

LU XUN

“THE SHADOW’S FAREWELL”

“SNOW”

“WAKING”

TRANSLATED BY MATT TURNER

THE SHADOW'S FAREWELL

One who sleeps until who knows when will have a shadow that takes leave with these words:

“There is in heaven something that I dislike, so I don't want to go. There is something in hell that I dislike, so I don't want to go. There is in your future “golden” world something that I dislike, so I don't want to go.

“Nevertheless, it's you I dislike.

“Friend, I don't want to follow you and I don't want to stay here.

“I'm unwilling!

“Oh, alas, I'm unwilling - but I'd rather wander in nothingness.

“I'm only a shadow who will leave you and sink into darkness. And however the dark will swallow me, the light will still make me vanish.

“Although I dislike oscillating between light and shade, I'd rather sink into the dark.

“However, in the end I still oscillate between light and shade, and I don't know whether it's dusk or dawn. I tentatively raise my ash-black hand and pretend to drain a cup of wine, and when I lose track of time I travel alone.

“Oh, alas, if it's dusk then the black night will naturally engulf me, and otherwise I'll vanish in daylight like it's dawn.

“Friend, the time's close.

“I'll turn to the darkness and wander in the nothingness.

“You still expect my largesse. What can I offer you? Ceaseless, it is still darkness and void and - stop. But I’d like only darkness, or to vanish into your daytime; I’d only like void that never seizes your heart.

“I’d like that, friend -

“I travel alone - not only without you, but in darkness without other shadows. Only myself submerged by darkness, that world wholly mine.”

September 24, 1924

SNOW

Rain in warm countries never changes into hard, bright, ice-cold snowflakes. To erudite people this is obvious, but does it, too, not also think this is unfortunate? The snow in Jiangnan can be extremely moist, and striking; it's the message of the still-blooming youth, and it's healthy, virgin skin. In the snowy wilds are blood-red mountain camellias, white plum-blossoms tinged with green, and the deep yellow bell-flowers of the immature plum. Under the snow are the cold, green weeds. There are no butterflies. Whether or not bees have come to mine the camellia flowers and plum-flowers for honey, I can't remember. But it's as if I can see it, and it's as if winter flowers bloom on the snowy wilds, and so many bees are busy flying, and I can hear them buzzing on.

Children breathe into their cold-reddened little hands, purple like ginger buds, and seven or eight of them come and mold a snow arhat. Because they don't succeed, someone's father comes and helps. The arhat is molded to be taller than the children, and although it's a only small pile on a big pile that finally could be a gourd or an arhat, it's a very pure white, very bright, and it uses its own moisture as a cement, and is illuminating. The children use longan seeds as eyes, and from somebody's mother's cosmetics case steal rouge to spread on, as lips. It has turned into a great arhat. And he with his shining eyes and red lips sits on the snowy ground.

On the second day some children call on him. Facing him they clap and nod their heads and laugh out. But, ultimately, he sits there alone. Nice days melt his skin, night freezes another layer on him, transforming him opaque like crystal looks. Clear days continue until he is unrecognizable, and the lips have also faded.

But the northern snowflakes that scatter last are always like powder, like sand, and they never adhere - they scatter on the house, on the ground or on the withered grass. The snow on the house quickly melts because of the warm home fires. The other snow, on nice days, when a gust suddenly comes and whips around; it's illuminated in daylight, as if a haze concealing a flame, revolving and rising, filling the air with rotating, rising, flashing.

In the boundless, open wilds, under heaven's bitter cold, the flashes that rotate and rise are the

ghost of the rain....

Yes, it is the lonely snow, the snuffed rain, the ghost of the rain.

January 18, 1925

WAKING

Planes on a mission to drop bombs, like the start of class at school every morning, fly over Beijing. Everytime I hear the sound of their parts pound the air I repeatedly feel a light tension, as though witnessing a “death” raid. But at the same time intensely feeling the “birth” of existence.

Faintly heard one or two explosions, the buzz-cry as the planes slowly fly off. And maybe there have been casualties, although all under heaven appears more peaceful. Outside the window the white poplar’s tender leaves in the sun emit a dark gold light, and the flowering plum blooms more brilliantly than yesterday. Clear the newspapers scattered all over my bed, wipe off yesterday night’s pale motes on the desk, my small and square study today and still is what you’d call “windows bright with table clean.”

For some reason I start to edit all the manuscripts I’ve accumulated by young writers here; I’ll clean them all up. I work through them in chronological order. And the spirits of the young people that refuse to polish themselves up, stand up before my eyes in turn. They’re graceful, they’re sincere, — but they’re oh so worried, and moan, and are indignant, and finally are rough - as my lovely young people.

Spirits blown around like sand in the wind, roughened. Because this is the human spirit, I love it. I wish to kiss upon the roughness, its formlessness and colorlessness, its bloodiness. In wispy well-known gardens the weird flowers are in full-bloom. Beautiful quiet women are aloof and leisurely, and a crane cries, and dense white clouds arise. This nature charms the spirit, but then I remember I’m living in the world of men.

I suddenly remember an incident: two or three years ago I was in Beijing University’s staff room and saw a young person I didn’t know come in, who silently gave me a package of books, then left. When I opened it there was the journal *Low Grass*. What a silence, that speaks what I can understand! Oh, what a rich gift! It’s too bad that *Low Grass* is no longer published; it seems to have turned into *The Sunken Bell*. And *The Sunken Bell* is in the wind- and sand-caverns, deep in the human sea, dinging alone at the bottom.

After the wild thistle is nearly crushed to death, one small flower will still bloom: I remember how this once moved Tolstoy, and he consequently wrote a novel. But the plants in the dry desert stretch out their roots to draw from the deep springs to become a dense green forest - nature for nature's growth, yet the tired, thirsty traveller thinks he's arrived at a temporary resting place. This is the way to be thankful, but also can be sad.

The Sunken Bell's "No Heading" — in place of an opening topic — says: "Some say: Our society is a desert. — If it were really a desert, then the wilderness should be silent, then the loneliness should give you a boundless feeling. But what is this chaos and this gloom, and these mutations?"

Yes, young people's spirits stand up before me. They have already been roughened, or are about to be roughened, but I love those with the bloody, dull pains of the spirit, because they let me know I'm in the world of men, am living in the world of men.

While editing, the sun sets unexpectedly in the west, and the lamp light allows me to continue. All sorts of youth flash before my eyes; around me nothing but dusk. I'm exhausted. I hold a cigarette and quietly think nameless thoughts and close my eyes, have a long dream. Suddenly alert, around me is still all dusk. The smoke rises up through the still air like so many tiny summer clouds slowly forming into indeterminate images.

April 10, 1926