

TEKSTER

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Annie Baobei

安妮宝贝

Annie Baobei 安妮宝贝 (f. 1972) er blant de mest omtalte og leste forfatterne i Kina. Hun bor og skriver i Beijing. Annie Baobei har gitt ut både romaner, noveller, dramatikk og essays, og skriver jevnlig for tidsskrifter som *Harvest*, *Writers* og *Elle*.

På grunn av sine historier om som ofte skildrer unge, urbane kineseres følelse av ensomhet og isolasjon, blir hun kalt "mørkets blomst". Hennes refleksjoner om moderne byliv har påvirket en generasjon av kinesiske lesere født etter 1980. Bestselgeren *Lotus* (se utdrag) er hennes fjerde bok, og følger novellesamlingen *Goodbye Vivien* og romanene *The Flower across the Bank* og *Two and Three Matters*. Kortprosasamlingen *The Road of Others* utgis på engelsk i 2012, som den første av Annie Baobeis bøker i oversettelse.

Lotus er en emosjonell kjærlighetsfortelling fra Tibet. Romanen lå på de kinesiske bestselgerlistene i flere uker etter utgivelsen. De to bybeboerne Shansheng og Qingzhao reiser til en fjerntliggende landsby i Tibet. Gjennom tilbakeblikk fra det åndelige og landlige Tibet til livene deres i den moderne storbyen, møter vi personer som ønsker å flykte fra det urbane kinesiske samfunnet.

Lotus

Annie Baobei

1

Act One Garden of Dreams

Sometime in the early morning hours, she heard a faint stirring. It sounded as though the man sharing the dormitory room with her had gotten out of bed in the darkness and was fumbling for the clothes he'd laid out, opening the door and leaving the room. In the cool, dim light, his white cotton shirt glimmered for an instant against the doorframe and was gone, like the wings of a bird passing through the night sky, leaving no trace. The cramped wooden stairs of the Rima Inn creaked with his every footfall, barely able to support his weight.

She opened her eyes, listening attentively. From outside came the hiss of rain. It reminded her of the sound of the silkworms she'd kept in a cardboard box as a child as they wriggled atop broad mulberry leaves, eating continuously throughout the night. Rich and sustained, it was the sound of rain.

More times than she could count, she had gone to bed wishing that she might awaken at such a moment, awaken to a view of Lhasa's night rains in all of their mystery, now visible, now vanishing. When the rest of nature had gone quiet, they would fall upon the mountain valleys and the soil of the high plateau, not stopping until shortly before dawn. But in the entire year and a half that she'd been here, she had never once suffered from insomnia. She slept soundly, falling, exhausted, into a deep sleep the moment her head touched the pillow. Perhaps the oxygen-poor air was slowing the flow of blood to her brain, because she experienced lightheadedness, a numbness, almost, that was one of the symptoms of altitude sickness. But she had no way of knowing if this was the case.

When she awakened again, it was about 7 am. The sky was bright, and the morning mists were clearly drawn, the way they are after a rain. There was no trace of the previous night's tumult. The single storey houses of the neighborhood's Tibetan residents spread beneath the windows of the inn, their multicolored

prayer-flags fluttering in the wind. A few scattered puddles of rain remained, waiting to be dried up by the sun that would soon break through the clouds. Once the land had reawakened, it would regain its fierce aridity.

The rains here, she had told him, are like a miracle. They elude observation. They come when they will, defying human understanding or prediction. You can travel the world over, but you'll never find this kind of rain anywhere else. It exists only here. It's a marvel you can experience, near enough to touch, but a world apart from any other experience in your life. It's a sacred sign, a blessing.

She always carried a notebook with her. She had copied into it some of the 19th century explorer Evariste-Regis Huc's descriptions of Lhasa, among other things. The chalky white pages were filled with a collage-like collection of writings—excerpts from books touching on a range of disparate subjects, snatches of poetry, all in no particular order. She had also slipped articles and illustrations torn from magazines in between the pages, covering everything from plants and food to pictures of people, local histories, and design ideas. There were sketches in pencil, architectural drawings, and studies of small objects. And mixed in with these were tiny but messy jottings in ballpoint pen.

"The Lhasa of Huc's time was a small but bustling town. Although two-thirds of the residents were monks or priests, a visitor did not feel himself immersed in an especially religious atmosphere... it was a place of contrasts: of rich and poor (false prosperity and patient poverty), of mercantile treachery and spiritual purity, of aristocratic superciliousness and the coarse simplicity of herdsmen. Lhasa offered examples of every sort of trade, aspiration, ethnic group and caste, all accompanied by the clang of anvils, the chanting of prayers, the trumpeting of conch shells, and the neighing of horses in the marketplace.

"In the daytime, there were Tibetans, Han Chinese, Mongolians, Kashmiris and dark-complexioned Bhutanese, laughing heartily, praying softly, or busy buying and selling. Only a portion of this diverse population actually resided in Lhasa—the rest were crosscountry travelers, itinerant beggars, monks and priests from neighboring lamaseries, and the occasional farmer or merchant who had only reached this place after several months' journey.

"Lhasa was best known for two products: woolen textiles and the ritual incense made for export to China. Only the Tibetans

manufactured these goods. Metalworking was dominated by highly skilled artisans, the noted goldsmiths, metal casters and ironsmiths of the Himalayan region...”

She was in love with words themselves and would whisper them softly as she read.

Their ordered composition created a mood in and of itself, one that bore no apparent relationship to the immediate surroundings. To this place. Here the rains always brought with them a period of turmoil, engulfing this wilderness city on the high plateau for the entire night. That is, if you could really call it a city. At times she felt it resembled most a forsaken palace, abandoned to the depths and silence of an ancient forest and overrun with vines. Murals, temples, Buddhas. Throngs of worshipers inching forward on prostrated bodies. The sun was closer here, the light didn't have to travel far—the connection between people and heaven was that much more intimate.

2

The Rima Inn, where she had lingered so long, was a small family-style hotel that was gradually falling into disrepair. Tourists who came during the high season were mostly attracted to the finely appointed and sparkling new hotels that lined either side of East Beijing Road. In contrast, the older inns were tucked back along many branched and winding lanes. These out-of-the-way guesthouses catered to repeat visitors who had something of the seeker in them. The Rima hosted a number of foreigners who had read its intriguing write-up in their *Lonely Planets*. Most of them were Korean or Japanese, but there were also a few Europeans. The inn's Western style dining room was spartan, but the fare was in no way lacking. Attached to the inn was a large flower-filled courtyard, where guests returning late at night could pump water from the well for bathing.

In the morning you would see young unmarried women, their long ink-black hair hanging free, cigarette in one hand and wash basin in the other, walking across the flagstones paving the garden on their way to the public baths. In the hallways, people sat on wooden chairs, slumped over their maps with dull expressions. If you couldn't sleep and wandered out into the corridors in the middle of the night, you could invariably find people still sitting there with that faraway look in their eyes. A handful of the inn's guests would stay for extended periods. Others only paused here

for a couple of nights before heading off again. It felt natural to walk up to another guest and ask for a light or strike up a conversation. You could talk to people whenever you pleased; you could also disappear whenever you pleased.

He had arrived in the middle of the night. When he pushed open the door, a breath of cool and damp, rain-scented air drifted into the room. He set down his duffel, flicked on the wall lamp and took off his windbreaker. The material's precision-engineered fibers stiffened and crackled in the air. Dim light reflected off the rain streaked windows, and seeming to float on the glass was the figure of a man from southern China, with the face of a twenty-five year old. But his eyes gave him away—she recognized them as the eyes of a man a full decade older.

I'm sorry if I woke you up, he said. I would have been here much earlier, but my car broke down.

He was soft-spoken, and yet surprisingly comfortable with her, as if he had known her for a long time. Before setting out on this journey, he had gone online to learn what he could about Lhasa, and he'd seen her name. Travelers who had passed this way before had posted travel notes or diaries on the Web, and some mentioned the woman who lived in room 307 of the Rima Inn. An eccentric woman who brewed Chinese medicine in the corridor every morning and seldom spoke. She had some sort of illness, something she was still trying to cure, and she was idling away the days in Lhasa as if she had nowhere else to go. Everyone speculated as to the nature of her disease; but no one knew where she went or what she did. All they knew was her name: Qingzhao.

It was September, and the peak season was long past. She had been the sole occupant of the room for some time. For a period, the room's two other beds had held a steady succession of guests. The people milling around Lhasa's streets had come from every corner of the earth, via various modes of transportation: plane, train, truck, bus, bicycle, or foot... coming together in this high plateau city, stopping briefly and then fanning out all over Tibet.

Everyone who had used this room and slept away the seemingly eternal nights had left behind traces of bodily warmth, of scent and voice, that ebbed and flowed like the tides. But she kept a sort of psychological distance from them, avoiding conversation and assiduously resisting anyone's attempts to get close to her or include her. She projected an aura that was decidedly self-controlled and intentional. She was like an island, still and

silent, subject to the mutable dictates of her internal compass, responding slowly, deliberately, to the changes around her. This afforded her a sense of safety. Barely speaking to anyone, she had gradually lost interest in others. It didn't take her long to forget the name, status, age, residence and other details about people once they'd left. Her mind was as empty as if she'd never known them. And she never remembered a face.

She took in the man's beauty, Narcissus reflected in flowing water, self-aware and self-contained, but oblivious to his beauty's power to touch anyone. He sat in the semidarkness, lamplight shining on him weakly. His eyes and brows were long and thin, on the verge of expressing something, and yet holding back. She instantly saw his emotional remove, as though he had taken one step back from the world. That was the sort of man he was. It was as if he were sitting alone on a cliff and watching the blue sea, his heart as calm and unruffled as a mirror.

Many years hence, she might also forget his face, just as she had forgotten all of the others. It was like unearthing an ancient clay vessel, unsealing the lid, and finding it filled with plums and deep green leaves, looking as fresh as if they had been picked that morning. But within a minute of being touched by the light, the fruits and foliage turned brown and withered. They were not meant to be exposed to light and air; their dark fastness was not to be transgressed. His physicality was an immanent truth she could touch. And yet she couldn't know him. No one close to him could grasp more than a half, a fifth, a tenth... or perhaps even less of his internal landscape.

And she would preserve or destroy her memories of him, just as she had all the others.

Translation by Andrea Lingenfelter

Prøveoversettelse for Peony Agency, ikke publisert

Cheng Yongxin

程永新

Cheng Yongxin 程永新 (f. 1958) er en anerkjent samtidsforfatter og sjefsredaktør for det skjønnlitterære tidsskriftet *Harvest* som ble grunnlagt i 1957. Han bor og arbeider i Shanghai. *Harvest* har svært høy anseelse i det kinesiske litteraturmiljøet for sin høye standard og kunstneriske karakter, og tidsskriftet har blitt hyllet som "et utriss av kinesisk litteratur de siste femti årene". Det er ett av få rene litteraturmagasiner i Kina.

Blant verkene til Cheng Yongxin, som benytter forfatternavnet Li Cheng, finner vi romanen *Tanten i splittkjole*, novellesamlingen *Det snør overalt* og prosasamlingen *Det startet i '83*. Boken *En persons litteraturhistorie* regnes for å være Kinas første personlige litteraturhistorie. Han har redigert samlingen *Kinesiske New Wave-romaner*, og blir av flere kinesiske forfattere kalt "en avantgardist blant avantgarden", "en forfatter blant forfattere" og "en redaktør blant redaktører". Utdraget er hentet fra romanen *Duft*.

Duft

Li Cheng

Fra første gangen jeg falt om under arbeid i ødemarka, da Mispel og Pomelo støttet meg opp på traktoren og hjem til landsbyen, turte jeg aldri å se inn i Pomelos glitrende hareøyne igjen. Jeg lå på håndtraktoren den dagen, hadde akkurat kommet til meg selv igjen, da jeg kjente den søte duften av tung parfyme. Den tykke, søte lukten omhylltet meg mens håndtraktoren humpet fremover. Jeg myste smått med øynene, og i all hemmelighet tok jeg et grådig trekk av denne forlokkende duften. Det verste var at jeg ikke lenge etter merket at jeg var begynt å bli som en narkoman – oppslukt av duften til Pomelos kropp.

Jeg ble sengeliggende en uke. Imens hendte det flere ganger at Pomelo kom drivende som et vindpust inn døren, den gode søtduften drivende inn sammen med henne. Hun pleide å komme bort til sengen min, rev opp myggnettingen som hang foran, strakte hodet inn med et skøyeraktig blick, spurte meg om et eller annet, eller slengte en pakke med tørket kjøtt eller annen snacks bort til meg der jeg lå.

Etter at vi kom hjem til landsbyen, var også Pomelo syk i mange dager. Som regel var landsbyen stille og rolig når arbeidsklokka ringte og solen hadde reist seg høyt på himmelen. Når jeg da hørte lyden av skritt tippe og tappe på leiregulvet i andre etasje, strammet hjertet seg brått til der jeg lå i sengen. Jeg lyttet, analyserte hvordan lyden av skritt jobbet seg gradvis ned trappen. Jeg vet ikke helt om jeg fryktet eller håpet at de nærmet seg.

Pomelo pleide å variere opptredene sine. Noen ganger lente hun seg mot vinduskarmen og mjauet som en katt. Andre ganger stakk hun hodet halvveis inn dørsprekken, mens hun hev noe skrot på myggnettingen. Og så kunne hun stampe som et jordskjelv mens hun gikk ned trappen, for så ikke å vise seg på en lang stund. Når jeg trodde hun ikke ville dukke opp igjen, sparket hun inn døren med et brak, kom brasende inn, og ropte "hold stille" til meg. Etterpå lo og flirte hun uten stans.

Forholdet mellom Pomelo og Hjorten lå der klart som dagen. Som kompaniets øverste leder, hadde Hauken opprettet et

sett med strenge ordensregler, som forbud mot røyking og kjærlighetsforhold, for å nevne noe. Men om han kom snublende inn i rommet vårt når Pomelo og Hjorten satt der, med hodene tett i tett, viskende lavt til hverandre, da ble selv Hauken flau i minen, og gikk ut igjen som om det hele aldri hadde skjedd.

Blant Haukens ordensregler var en om at de mannlige arbeiderne ikke fikk gå opp til jentenes kaserne etter klokken ti om kvelden. Hauken skjønte ikke at dette bare gjorde den forbudne frukten desto mer fristende. Så snart det var klar bane, var det noen av guttene som tok seg forsiktig opp til andre etasje.

Senere tok Hauken drastiske virkemidler i bruk for å stramme inn kompaniets moral. Hver dag fikk han ordensvakter til å gjemme seg under de to trappeoppgangene i øst og vest. Med en halvtimes mellomrom gikk de opp trappen for å patruljere korridoren i andre etasje. Ordensvaktene ordnet også et passord for formålet, bestemt av Hauken personlig. Passordet byttet de hver dag: Hver kveld, på slaget klokken ni, møtte vaktkapteinen opp på kompaniets kontor, og mottok der et nytt passord formulert på stedet av Hauken.

Men ungdommens følelser er som en præriebrann, de lar seg ikke slukke så lett. Det første mottiltaket guttene kom på, var å snike seg opp til jentene tidlig etter middag, for så å gjemme seg bak myggnettingen da klokken var passert ti. Jentene hang med vilje opp nyvaskede klær til tork tett i tett i vinduet, og stengte slik for de nølende blikkene til ordensvaktene som når som helst kunne dukke opp.

Også jeg hadde vært oppe i jentenes kaserne en gang. Det var på Hjortens oppfordring at jeg forsiktig tok mine skritt opp trappen til andre etasje.

Den kvelden fant jeg ikke Flaggermusen. "Du må få tak i Flaggermusen", sa Hjorten, mens han dyttet meg ut døren. Han pekte på en lukket dør oppe i korridoren i andre etasje, og ville at jeg skulle rope høyt etter Flaggermusen. Jeg ble stående der uten å vite mine arme råd.

"Rop 'a, rop 'a!" Hjorten egget meg iherdig på. Da lyden av ropet mitt kom, smatt han raskt bort til et mørkt sted for å gjemme seg.

Døren i andre etasje åpnet seg, lampelyset strømmet ut. Pomelo kom bort til gelenderet, leende, bøyde seg ned og sa at Flaggermusen ikke var inne på rommet deres. Hun gikk ikke

inn igjen etter å ha sagt det. Først blunket hun raskt, så seg om et lite øyeblikk. Så sa hun at om jeg ikke trodde henne, kunne jeg komme opp og se selv. Hjorten, som skjulte seg i mørket, gestikulerte noe til meg, det virket som han ville at jeg skulle dra opp og se. Jeg ble bare mer og mer forvirret. Hvorfor Hjorten på død og liv ville at jeg skulle finne Flaggermusen, hvorfor ting ble som de ble etterpå, gikk først langsomt opp for meg etter en lang tid var gått.

Med hjertet i halsen skrittet jeg opp trappen. Mens jeg klatret opp mot dette mystiske, forbudte stedet, var mitt indre jeg fylt av angst og frykt. Da jeg nærmet meg toppen, for en mann smidig forbi. Idet skulderen hans støtte mot min, blunket han og smilte hemmelighetsfullt til meg.

"Passordet?!" sa han plutselig.

"Takrør!" glapp det ut av meg. Så fulgte jeg opp med å spørre tilbake: "Passordet?!"

"Takrør! Takrør!" kom det fra ham.

Passordet hadde Hjorten fortalt meg nå nettopp.

Så hørte jeg lyden av en latter, og først da kjente jeg ham igjen: det var det store og kraftige Neshornet. Han ville skremme meg, tydeligvis, men idet han gjorde det, hadde han også klart å få tak i passordet for kvelden. I ansiktsuttrykket hans kunne jeg spore en viss overraskelse over å ha støtt på meg underveis til forbudssonen. Blikket mitt fulgte ryggen til Neshornet, men da jeg kom til toppen av trappen og kikket ned korridoren, var det ikke et fnugg å se av ham.

Jeg gikk forsiktig bortover, mens jentenes rom flakket raskt forbi øynene mine, ett etter ett. Fra rommene lød lyden av mannlige stemmer, og slik lå stedet gjennomsyret av den lykkelige stemningen til begge kjønn i samkvem. Under jerndisiplin og strenge tøyler, alle disse stille måneskinnsnettene, da jeg hadde trukket meg inn bak kompaniets reserverte omgangsform, hadde jeg aldri sett for meg musevrimmelen av skritt opp trappen til jentenes kaserne, aldri kjent at bak myggnettingene i andre etasje, ventet det sterke synet av jenter og gutter i elskov ved parafinovnene. Først da, i dette øyeblikket, forsto jeg at livet mitt på kysten hadde vært bornert, enfoldig og stusselig.

Jeg stoppet foran en dør og banket på. Det ene hjørnet av gardinen ble løftet opp, et ansikt flakket raskt forbi. Før jeg fikk sett det klart, ble døren åpnet brått. Jenta som åpnet døren, rakk

hånden ut mot meg og ledet meg inn i rommet, og jeg hadde knapt nok kommet meg over dørstokken, før hun smelte døren lynraskt igjen. Noe lignende hadde jeg bare sett i spionfilmer.

Hjorten hadde slett ikke tatt feil; der inne var Flaggermusen. Han satt midt i rommet med en parafinovn foran seg. En femseks kvinner, Pomelo blant dem, omkranset ham. De skjenket ham vin, de helte te til ham, de kom med håndklær, ydmyke som tjenerinner som varter opp en keiser. Med en skje forsynte han seg av godsakene som kokte i kjelen på parafinovnen, og stappet det inn i munnen sin med store jafs. Innimellom fortsatte han i ro og mak på fortellingen sin.

En av jentene dro meg bort til en liten benk for at jeg skulle sette meg. På denne oppildnede kvelden, var jeg med jentene og hørte på Flaggermusen, som satt der sprudlende av liv og fortalte oss en gripende, innfløkt historie. Mange år etterpå satt jeg på universitetsbiblioteket, der jeg nettopp hadde lest ferdig Greven av Monte Christo. Jeg kastet et langt blikk ut mot gressplenen, da det gikk det opp for meg at historien i boken var nøyaktig den samme som Flaggermusen hadde fortalt for å bytte til seg jentenes oppsparte kapital: hermetikkboksene. På kysten var det fattige kår, og det kunne gå to-tre måneder mellom hver gang man fikk rasjoneringskort for et måltid kjøtt. Familiene deres hadde sendt dem boksene i posten, slik at de skulle ha noe godt å spise. Men som regel holdt de seg for gode til å spise det selv; de brukte heller alt som gaver til Flaggermusen. Vinen gikk de sammen om å kjøpe i fabrikkiosken, med det lille de hadde klart å spare opp av småpenger.

Mens jeg satt i lampelyset i skumringen, ble det rastløse blikket mitt smeltet gradvis av vanddampen som kom stigende opp. Jeg glemte lyden av patruljens fotsteg utenfor, glemte ordren vår om ikke å gå inn i forbudssonen, glemte sågar Hjorten, som fortsatt sto der nede og ventet på at jeg skulle gi lyd fra meg. Jeg stirret på Flaggermusens flagrende lepper, det karakteristiske kinnnet, den nonchalante og grenseløst karismatiske nesen hans. Det var en ting jeg ikke klarte å forstå: Det kompliserte, gåteaktige forholdet mellom Hjorten, Pomelo, Flaggermusen og disse jentene. Hvorfor ville Pomelo lure meg eller Hjorten nå nettopp? Hvordan kunne Hjorten være så sikker på hvor Flaggermusen var? Det var alltid noe spesielt over forholdet til Flaggermusen og Hjorten, men da jeg så Flaggermusens frilynte, hjemmевante

væremåte inne på rommet til Pomelo, skjønte jeg at her var han en stamgjest. Kvinnene virket alle samstemte om, og innforstått med, at de skulle dekke over dette med Flaggermusen, de visste utmerket godt om det tvilsomme forholdet mellom Hjorten og Pomelo, og hvorfor det måtte være slik ...

Oversatt av Lars Devold
For Litteraturhuset

Han Song

韩松

Han Song 韩松 er en av Kinas mest kjente og profilerte science fiction-forfattere. Journalisten og bloggeren fikk stor oppmerksomhet i Kina etter at han vant en skrivekonkurranse i et taiwansk litteraturtidsskrift. Senere har han vunnet anerkjennelse også internasjonalt for sine romaner, selv om de foreløpig ikke er oversatt fra kinesisk.

Science fiction er en relativt ny sjanger i Kina, og Han Song er en inspirator for yngre kinesiske forfattere. Han er kjent for skildringer av avansert teknologi, og sin evne til å skildre det moderne Kina gjennom realistiske fremtidsversjoner. Han har selv uttalt at Kina endrer seg så raskt og dramatisk at virkeligheten overgår fiksjonen: Å være journalist og forfatter i dagens Kina er som å flytte inn i en science fiction-verden .

Han Song har gitt ut blant annet kortprosasamlingen *Gravestone of the Universe*, og romanene *Let's All Look for Aliens* og *Manmade Man*. Hans siste roman, *Subway* (2010), handler om en gruppe kinesiske oppdagelsesreisende som reiser tilbake til hjemlandet for å lete etter spor av kinesisk kulturhistorie og mennesker i Beijings t-banetunneler. Deres forfedre ble kastet ut av solsystemet da fremmede krefter tok kontroll over jorden.

The Wheel of Samsara

Han Song

When on Mars the young man often visited her home. The student usually launched a dispute with her father on the unexplainable universe. When the two men's faces turned red owing to the quarrel, she sat aside quietly, listening to and watching them with a curious expression. How lovely the men were.

Now she anticipated if the student could take her to the mini universe in the wheel, and that would be the most exciting journey of her life.

She'd always take the student's side. It was the side of unorthodoxy.

"The universe is trapped in the wheel. It can neither move nor evolve, and it can not be observed with eyes or telescopes. It can only give out some poor sounds to tell about its past and attract passer-bys' attention. How innocent it is. It does not even know that the era out of the wheel is against its own," She said, red-eyed.

"How do you know that it can not move or evolve? How do you know that it needs our pity? Maybe the truth is the other way around," said the boy, looking at the girl with a tender expression.

Being aware that his daughter might like the bothersome student, her father felt unhappy.

His sight became ferocious when it fixed on the wheel. He began to regard it as a tumour growing on the planet, and it was threatening the order and intellect of the human world.

He should cut it off.

One day he told the lama that he would carry the wheel to Mars for the purpose of scientific research.

Her daughter and the student were shocked upon hearing the request.

"Professor, you can not do that. The Wheel of Samsara only belongs to the lamasery, and it only belongs to Tibet!"

"Father, you can not take it away, it can only give out its voice here. It will die if you take it to a different place!"

Father just sneered, and gazed at the lamas, waiting for a

reply. The lamas seemed to have no clear idea about her father's request, and they were all at a loss. Her father thought that they would not agree with him, but he said: "Let's make a deal. How much is it?"

The lamas gathered and murmured for a while. Then an old lama, possibly the living Buddha of the lamasery, stepped forward and said to father: "My benefactor, if you really want it, just take it away. Is there anything in the world that we can not give up? And it is the wheel's fate."

The reply went beyond father's expectations.

Watching the lama's peaceful face, the daughter and the student were also stunned.

#

Father picked the wheel up. The wheel was so heavy that he could hardly hold it up.

At that moment, all the lamas walked out of the temple. They lowered their heads and began reciting sutras.

Father removed the wheel to the ground in front of the temple, placing it well, and stared at it with a thoughtful expression.

The daughter and student did not know what he was going to do next.

Suddenly, father burst into a bewildering laughter, just like an owl, and he pulled out his laser cutter, waving it toward the wheel.

"Let's see the real face of the so-called hidden universe!" he cried.

The daughter and student were frightened. They stepped forward to stop her father but it was too late. The wheel was cut into two pieces down the middle, falling apart to the solid ground.

It was empty. Nothing was inside.

The lamas suddenly fell silent. So did the mountains and the sky. She felt extremely uncomfortable.

After a while, the sky became dark, and stars were just inches away from people's heads.

Everybody looked upward in astonishment.

At that moment, a silent, bright white light flashed across the sky, splitting the sky into two pieces, just like the laser cutter had cleaved the wheel.

Millions of wheels appeared in the sky, just like flocks of birds. They were spaceships she had never seen before. They were escaping something, in haste.

The lamas kneeled down and began to pray.

Then the split sky began to fold along the white light in the middle of the universe.

And so did the vast land. The shadows of mountains rushed to an unnamed centre, just like fighting beasts, and their bodies huddled together.

She lowered her head and saw the shadow of her body begin to bend, just like a tree eaten away by insects, and it finally broke from her waist.

Then all the shadows folded together from opposite directions, swallowing all the people, all the mountains and rivers, and all the oceans and stars.

The lamas' smile flashed as an arc on the last second.

Nobody could see how the Big Bang started – it was quite different from all of humanity's previous hypothesis.

Hong Ying

虹影

Hong Ying 虹影 (f. 1962) er en av Kinas internasjonalt mest kjente forfattere. Etter litt mer enn ti år i Storbritannia, flyttet hun tilbake til Kina i 2004. I dag bor og skriver hun i Beijing. Hong Ying skriver ofte om marginaliserte grupper, med kontroversielle temaer som homofili og seksualitet, men mest av alt skriver hun historier fra kinesisk hverdagsliv – som ikke alltid har gått gjennom den rettslige sensuren i fastlands-Kina.

Hong Yings romaner er oversatt til mer enn tjue språk, deriblant norsk (*Svikets sommer* på Tiden i 1997, og selvbiografien *Elvens datter* på samme forlag i 1999). Også *K: The Art of Love, Concubine of Shanghai* (se utdrag) og *Peacock Cries* er tilgjengelige på engelsk.

Hennes siste bok oversatt til engelsk, *Concubine of Shanghai* som utdraget her er hentet fra, handler om tre kvinner i ulike maktposisjoner i Shanghais underverden tidlig på nittenhundretallet. Figuren Cassie er bygget på en historisk skikkelse fra Shanghai, og romanen beskriver hennes vei fra fattig og foreldreløs jente fra landet til å bli kalt "dronningen av Shanghai".

The concubine of Shanghai **Hong Ying**

- Excerpt from chapter 2 -

The so-called 'Studio' – the Duchess Pavilion on Little West Gate Street – was originally one of the residences of a famous gentleman from Songjiang, in the era of Emperor Xianfeng. A romantic, the gentleman bequeathed the building to a favourite concubine. She had originally been a prostitute and had an ambition to become a duchess; but – unexpectedly widowed – found her self with just one possession: the building the old man had left her. Poor and downtrodden, she used it to rebuild her old career, calling it the 'Duchess Pavilion', in memory of happier times.

Madame Emerald was the present owner. Whenever she talked about the building, she claimed the story was true. She even produced the old man's painting as evidence, saying that these were left to her as presents by the would-be duchess. Songjiang was Madame Emerald's hometown and she herself had once been the Duchess Pavilion's top courtesan. Indeed, the paintings were genuine, but we will keep the name of the famous gentleman secret for now.

During the years of Emperor Tongguang's rule, parcels of land in Shanghai had begun to be awarded to foreigners as 'concessions'. A 'red light' district was quickly established, with many prosperous brothels that varied greatly in class. The Duchess Pavilion was at the top end of the market and prided itself on keeping a distance from the rest.

Situated on the border of the Chinese and foreign concessions the building had a deep purple gate, a high threshold, and heavily set, sturdy stone walls. The atmosphere was forbidding, but despite the fact that from the outside it appeared to be grand and stately, the inside of the building had long been divided into smaller apartments. All of Madame Emerald's courtesans lived on the first floor, each with her own richly decorated bedroom and sitting room. Some say the floors of certain rooms were paved with gold and silver, which in itself was enough to make the building famous in Shanghai.

The clientele were typically men of status; indeed, some came along with the specific intention of showing off status. There was another reason why they liked frequenting the Pavilion: those who lived in the areas of Shanghai that were currently controlled by foreigners felt they were returning to a more familiar China, if only for a short time, while those from the Chinese city felt they were already halfway out of the reach of the authorities; here, they could indulge themselves in a more relaxed fashion.

Cassia maintained a smile whether she was with other people or alone. People said she had a sweet smile. She wore a servant girl's dress; with a single thick plait instead of her previous two plaits and a neat fringe across her forehead.

She'd shot up in height over the last six months. Everyone said she should have been a common maid instead; who'd ever seen such a tall servant girl? She wasn't fit to serve guests.

This proved to be a considerable headache for Madame Emerald. A servant girl cost a certain amount, but once purchased such a girl belonged to you and was totally at your mercy. But a maid was merely an employee; one had to pay her wages by the month, and she'd be free to leave whenever she wanted to. For Madame Emerald to have paid a servant girl's fee for someone who was only fit to be a common maid wasn't such a good deal. So Cassie remained a servant girl.

In the early mornings the kitchen was busy. The two chefs, both from Suzhou, and their helpers killed chickens, ducks and fish. The blood had to be cleaned up straight away, as the first thing Madame Emerald would do after she rose was inspect the kitchen. If she found one feather or even a drip of grease, she'd fine the cook's helpers. They trod carefully, closely watching the maids as they came and went from the various rooms, in case they were punished for someone else's mistake.

Cassia was still growing, she had become annoyingly tall, but was also strong. Unlike the other servant girls, who looked for men to help them carry heavy things, people often turned to her when Madame Emerald needed something done quickly.

By now Cassia had also learned to be less clumsy, and could hold a tea tray level while walking fast. Coming out of the kitchen, she passed through the large room where the older servant girls slept, full of envy. When would she ever get to sleep there? Her

own 'bedroom' – if you could call it that – was a small room in the basement with a tiny window, narrow and crowded and shared with several young servant girls. She had to move over onto one side of the bed to get to her sleeping space and the amount of room she was allocated was only just big enough for her to turn over whilst she was sleeping.

But compared to where she came from this was heaven. She ate well: last night's leftovers from the courtesans, after they'd been reheated, tasted as good as new to her. Madame Emerald, though she had cursed Cassia several times for growing so quickly, made her new clothes. Here, even a servant girl must dress well.

It was nearly dusk. Cassia passed along the corridor and climbed the stairs. The low whispers and songs of the courtesans mingled with the sound of teasing and flirtation. She went to the grand Phoenix Hall, where Madame Emerald herself lived. Sometimes a new customer was received there, both to show the goodwill of the hostess and to establish some sort of protocol, as befitted an establishment as grand as the Duchess Pavilion. Here the newcomer would be entertained by Madame Emerald herself and offered wine by each of the courtesans. Only if the visitor came a second time would he be allowed into the sitting room of his chosen girl. Only on the third visit might he be allowed into her bedroom.

The sun was setting and the sky was streaked with purple and blue. Street lights began to be lit. The girls in the 'studio', having woken up at noon, had spent the whole afternoon dressing. The housekeeper was busy accepting invitations, loudly shouting out the names of the girls who had been invited out, or whose appearance had been requested here in the studio, or who had been invited to a tea party. Elegantly dressed guests would arrive with myna birds, which, in response to the hustle and bustle, might suddenly caw: '*Ji Li Fa Cai!* – Be lucky! Be prosperous!'

This was the busiest time of the day at Duchess Pavilion.

Three carriages pulled up outside. As soon as they stopped, attendants from the front and back coaches rushed to the middle one and opened the door, to help out Chang Lixiong, the Grand Master of the Hong Brotherhood. But the man stepped out by himself and strode away, showing that he was not the sort of person who was in need of help.

Little West Gate Street was long, but not wide. Standing at

one end you could not see the other: the two sides of the street were filled with pharmacies, bathhouses, inns, restaurants and grocery shops – a prosperous world. Tonight there was no wind or rain and it was even more crowded than usual.

An awkward-looking pedlar huddled close to one of Chang Lixiong's young attendants and whispered to him conspiratorially: 'Western pornography?' The young attendant shoved the pedlar away. He used his considerable amount of force and the pedlar was pushed several feet, collapsing on the ground as the pictures in his hands were scattered all around. He shouted loudly: 'Master, master, you only have to say "no" if you don't want it.'

The attendant's face did not move a muscle; he barked: 'Step aside! Watch out!', as he moved to stop the pedlar from approaching his boss.

But Chang Lixiong spoke in a soothing voice. 'There's no need to be so though. He's only doing his job. I'm not the Governor of Shanghai, why should he be stopped?' Watching the weak pedlar's body as he crouched down, he said to his guards: 'Just make sure he hasn't any weapons on him.'

The pedlar, who had earlier been frightened by the guard, stumbled up and collected his pictures. What Chang Lixiong had said made him realise he was safe. He lowered his body, wrinkled his face into a smile and spread out the pictures in his hands: 'Master, master, please do me a favour of having a look at this... just have a look,' he urged, in a subservient voice.

It was a set of prints of Western paintings: Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, Ingres's *The Source* and *Turkish Baths*. Either they had been sold by Western sailors, or produced by a printing house with the latest equipment. The pedlar picked out a few and handed them over.

The quality of the printing was poor; so these must be the cheap copies the sailors brought over. All pictures in those days were tainted yellow and looked old.

'When Chinese and Westerners mingle, that's when trouble starts,' Madame Emerald had once said to Cassia. This incident of Chang Lixiong looking at the Western nudes was of course further evidence of the truth of this adage.

Indeed, everything started with the appearance of these pictures, although they seemed insignificant at the time.

His eyes flicked over the images briefly and Chang Lixiong waved

his hands at the pedlar: 'Away, away! What rubbish. I'm only interested in the live variety.'

The Grand Master of the Hong Brotherhood was between forty and fifty years old, tall and well built and wore a long gown. Close up, one could see the hints of blue and purple in the dark silk pattern over the black base of his robe. They had been expecting him for a long time, and someone opened the door for him as soon as he reached the gate. Lifting up his gown, Chang Lixiong stepped over the high threshold.

The sound of music and laughter greeted him, mingled with the scent of perfume. 'It's Master Chang himself!' There came the sound of cheers and greetings from the woman who had gathered. 'It's been so long!'

'It's been such a long time, how we've missed you!'

'Come sisters, come and attend to Master Chang!'

Madame Emerald drew open the curtains that surrounded the bed, and hooked them up on either side. Master Chang, as they called him at the Duchess Pavilion, sat by the bedside, while she herself knelt behind him on the bed and energetically massaged his back. She was still a beauty; with an oval face, high eyebrows and long almond-shaped eyes. A courtesan who, at the age of forty, could still make an old lover feel attached to her; she had not done badly.

Her jet black hair was pinned back, smooth and neat; her small feet were wrapped inside a pair of embroidered shoes, with only the toes peeking out from beneath her silk trousers. This was the feature – aside from the face of course – that a girl from the Duchess Pavilion should be most proud of; the part that the guests admired and fondled the most, and naturally the part the girls spent the most time and effort on.

Madame Emerald focused her attention entirely on Master Chang, whispering into his ears, her lips almost touching his cheeks. He listened and smiled, touching her hand.

Cassia entered through the wide-open gate of the Phoenix Hall and into the bedroom, holding a tray laden with tea. Her steps were hardly audible. The couple inside the room barely even glanced at her. She walked to the table by the bed and put the tea set down.

Madame Emerald was saying how difficult business was nowadays, with the revolutionaries and the chaos they caused.

His eyes half-closed, Master Chang enjoyed her pampering. But he was not too impressed by her words: How could business not be good when so many rich men from the South had escaped to Shanghai?

'What I meant was there are less and less guests with taste; and even fewer who are generous with their cash.'

Madame Emerald sighed: 'If this is the way things are going, do you think even we courtesans will have to be revolutionised?'

Master Chang laughed: 'All right, let's all unite in the great cause.'

As Cassia bent down to the tray he heard her and opened his eyes. Noticing her unbound feet, his eyes moved up her legs and lingered on her face. Their eyes met by accident and Cassia immediately lowered her eyelids. She stood attentively. Only when Madame Emerald asked her to leave could she move. This was the house rule.

Chang Lixiong patted Madame Emerald's bottom. Was this girl new? He hadn't seen her before. He remembered that Madame Emerald had been down to the Chuansha area to look for new servant girls. He had sent his own aide Yu to be her guard.

'She is indeed a peasant girl I picked up in Chuansha,' Madame Emerald told him. 'But it's so hard to find a decent girl in the countryside these days!' She asked Cassia to step forward and show herself to Master Chang: 'Look how ugly this girl is: her eyes are too big, her mouth is too wide, her legs are too long...she's just too tall.' Her fingers almost touching Cassia; she exclaimed: 'The strangest thing of all is this pair of mysteriously large breasts! As ugly as can be. But to buy her I still had to pay her aunt a big pile of silver.'

Master Chang asked simply: 'How old is she?'

'Well they say she's fifteen, but she doesn't look like it. I've wasted my money buying this one! Look how well I fed her, now she looks all pink and healthy like a farm girl.'

'I am sixteen, my lord.' Cassia's voice was clear and loud, but she dared not look up to the two on the bed.'

'Who said you could speak?' Madame Emerald hit Cassia's chest with her fan: 'I asked you to bind up your chest, how dare you let your breasts loose again?!'

As Chang Lixiong's eyes were on her, Cassia protested half-heartedly – yet somehow she didn't want to give in to Madame Emerald under such an intense stare. She licked her dry lips and

said softly: 'I couldn't breathe...'

Madame Emerald interrupted her: 'If you don't want to bind your chest, then pay me back my money!' she turned to Master Chang and complained: 'I've never seen such an ugly girl. If it hadn't been for the untimely death of her parents, I wouldn't have taken her. I took pity on her, yet how can I keep such an ugly girl in my reputable house? I would like to use her as a common maid but they have to be married women. Two months ago a rich Nanjing guest took a fancy to her and I asked her to attend to him, thinking perhaps I could help her by making her one of my entertaining girls.'

'I'm sure that a cunning lady like you sorted it all out,' Master Chang teased.

Ignoring the irony in his voice, Madame Emerald carried on: the girl had fought him off, and made such a scene – as if losing her virginity was a matter of life and death – that she ended up annoying the guest, so much that Madame Emerald herself had to ask for his forgiveness. The girl was punished by the housekeeper of course, and had all the usual beatings. Still she would not give in. She was locked up for two days, yet was still stubborn. What fuss she had made, despite the fact that she was the humblest and most ugly girl in the house.

All this aroused Chang Lixiong's interest. He started to look at the girl in a new way.

Translation by Liu Hong
Marion Boyars Publishers, 2008

Lan Lan

蓝蓝

Lan Lan 蓝蓝 (f. 1967) omtales som en av de mest innflytelsesrike samtidspoetene i Kina. Hun bor og arbeider i Beijing. Hennes ni diktsamlinger, deriblant *Songs of Romance* (1993), *Sleep Sleep* (2003) og *From Here, to There* (2008), er bestselgere i hjemlandet. Hun har også gitt ut tre prosasamlinger og flere barnebøker.

Lan Lan er oversatt til mer enn ti språk og har vunnet flere svært anerkjente litterære priser for sitt forfatterskap, som Liu Li'an poesipris, Poetry & People Award, Yulong poesipris og en rekke andre.

Utdragene viser utvalgte dikt fra Lan Lan, oversatt på den amerikanske nettsiden InTranslation.

Selected Poems **By Lan Lan**

Inside eternity...

Few rain inside eternity. A small wind.
Forlorn sorrow inside eternity, at dusk
.....a blank lost look.
Apple flowers fall on tombstones;
singing, desolation of a night town;
two wheat ears, a cloud
put them in your blue.

Vérité

The dead knows our lies. Morning
forest birds know the wind.
Fruits know blood nourished by earth.
Cries know a wineglass dignity.
Stone in the throat evokes a ghost.
Drink it! Beastly car wheels need its grease–
Pulverize man, and what teeth try to say.
Our world twists in the crack of a blind's brain
...where dark comes from

Wind

Wind blows away something from his body.
Wooden bridge. Night of dewdrops on stitchwort leaves.
An arm.....a face.....a forest
of dandelions in the eyes.
Wind blows away the canyon in his body.
An empty room. The voices of silence
left on the wall for years.
Wind blows away his organs.....the horizon of his kin.
Wind empties him.
He becomes a grain of sand.....powder
.....Wind lets him live on forever–

Wild Sunflowers

By autumn wild sunflower heads
will be chopped.
The man walking away from her will suddenly
return. Dusk is nearing,
with sunset her face becomes
golden smoke,
blending with the endless summer.
Through whom? Skies of buckwheat flowers?
Old memories veiled by sorrow, for whom
will I die again?
Unreal wild sunflowers. Unreal
singing.
Lethal thorns of autumn wind prick my chest.

Untitled

I don't love coat, I love body.
Or a cotton shoulder pad for a soul,
the stillness within a beating heart.
I want both: light and flame.
My love is gentle yet proud.
But here I'm, beyond words,
between coat and body.

Translation by Fiona Sze-Lorrain
www.intranslation.brooklynrail.org

Ma Jian

马建

Ma Jian 马建 (f. 1953) vant stor internasjonal anerkjennelse for sin reiseskildring *Rødt Støv*. Hans hovedverk, *Beijing koma*, om studentoppgjøret på Tiananmenplassen i 1989 kom på norsk i 2010.

Før Ma Jian ble forfatter, malte han propagandaskilt, jobbet som klokkereparatør og fotojournalist i et statlig magasin. Etter å ha reist rundt i Kina i tre år, skrevet reiseskildringen *Rødt støv* og bodd noen år i Hong Kong, flyttet han tilbake til fastlands-Kina og ble en aktiv støttespiller for de prodemokratiske studentene på Tiananmenplassen i 1989. Ma Jian bor og arbeider i dag i Storbritannia.

Utdraget er hentet fra romanen *Beijing koma* som skildrer studenten Dai Weis historie. Han er blant tusenvis av studenter på Den himmelske freds plass, og etter at en soldat skyter en kule mot hodet hans, havner han i koma. Fra sykesengen husker han tilbake på sitt eget liv: skammen han følte da hans opposisjonelle far kom hjem fra arbeidsleir, den politiske oppvåkningen, studentkampene og de uendelige interne motsetningene.

Beijing koma

Ma Jian

Gjennom det gapende hullet hvor glassverandaen en gang var, ser du at akasietreet som ble meid ned av bulldoseren sakte reiser seg igjen. Det er et tydelig tegn på at du heretter må ta livet ditt alvorlig.

Du strekker hånden ut etter en pute og dytter den innunder nakken slik at blodet i hjernen renner tilbake til hjertet og tankene klarer. Moren din gjorde det samme for deg iblant.

Sølvskimrende morgener er alltid fylt med nye forsetter. Men dette er den første dagen i det nye tusenåret, og demringen er mer mett av dem enn noen gang før.

Selv om vinterkulden ennå ikke har satt inn, føles den svake brisen iskald mot ansiktet.

En stank av urin henger fortsatt igjen i rommet. Den siver ut gjennom porene når sollyset faller på huden.

Du ser ut. Morgendisen løfter seg ikke fra bakken slik den gjorde i går. I stedet faller den fra himmelen og ned på trekronene, for så å bevege seg langsomt mellom bladene og gli forbi det blodstenkte brevet som er fanget i grenene.

Før spurven kom, hadde du nesten sluttet å tenke på flukt. Så, i fjor vinter, kom den seilende over himmelen og landet foran deg, eller rettere sagt på vinduskarmen i den innebygde verandaen ved siden av soverommet. Du visste at de skitne rutene var dekket av døde maur og støv og luktet like surt som gardenene. Men spurven brydde seg ikke. Den hoppet inn på verandaen, bruste med fjærene og krydret luften med en søt eim av bark. Så fløy den inn i soveværelset, landet på brystet ditt og ble liggende der som et kjølig egg.

Blodet ditt blir varmere. Musklene i øyehulene sitrer. Øynene dine vil snart fylles med tårer. Spytt drypper ned på ganespeilet bak i munnen. En refleks aktiveres, og ganen hever seg, lukker nesegangen og lar spyttet renne ned i svelget. Musklene i spiserøret, som har slumret i så mange år, trekker seg sammen og skyver spyttet ned i magen. Et bioelektrisk signal skyter som et lysglimt fra neuronene i hjernebarken nedover ryggraden og til

en muskelfiber helt ute i fingertuppen.

Nå trenger du ikke lenger å støtte deg på minnene for å komme gjennom dagen. Dette er ikke et blaff av liv før død. Dette er en ny begynnelse.

«Vrææl, vrææl ...»

Et spedbarns halvkalte skrik skjærer gjennom stanken. En bitte liten naken kropp skjelver på et kaldt sementgulv ... Det er meg. Jeg har kravlet ut mellom mors lår, hodet sprenget av smerte. Jeg klasker hånden i blodpølen som brer seg rundt meg ... Mor fortalte ofte at hun ble tvunget til å bære en trøye brodert med ordene EN HØYREAVVIKERS KONE da hun fødte meg. Legen som var på vakt, våget ikke å hjelpe denne «sønnen av en kapitalisthund» til verden. Heldigvis besvimte mor etter at vannet gikk, slik at hun ikke følte noen smerte da jeg skjøv meg ut i sykehuskorridoren.

Og nå, etter alle disse årene, ligger også jeg bevisstløs på et sykehus. Kun den sporadiske lyden av glassampuller som brytes, forteller meg at jeg fortsatt lever.

Ja, det er meg. Mors eldste sønn. Øynene til en begravd frosk glimter i hodet mitt. Den lever fortsatt. Jeg fanget den i en glasskrukke og grov den ned i jorden ... Den mørke korridoren utenfor er veldig lang. I enden ligger operasjonsstuen, hvor kroppor behandles som kjøttklumper ... Og jenta jeg ser nå – hva heter hun? A-Mei. Hun kommer gående mot meg som en hvit silhuett. Hun lukter ingenting. Leppene hennes bevrer.

Jeg ligger i en sykeseng, akkurat som far før han døde. Jeg heter Dai Wei – frøet han etterlot seg. Begynner jeg å huske nå? Jeg må være i live. Eller kanskje jeg er på vei bort, og beveger meg gjennom min egen fortids ruiner for aller siste gang. Nei, jeg kan ikke være død. Jeg hører lyder. Døden er stille.

«Han bare later som om han er død ...» mumler moren min til en eller annen. «Jeg kan ikke spise denne kålen. Den er jo full av sand.»

Det er meg hun snakker om. Jeg hører en lyd like inntil øret. Det rumler i en mage.

Hvor er munnen min? Ansiktet? Jeg ser en gul flekk foran øynene, men jeg kan ikke lukte noe ennå. Jeg hører et spedbarn gråte i det fjerne, og lyden av en termos som fylles medvarmt vann.

Det gule lyset splintres. Kanskje fløy en fugl over himmelen.

Jeg føler at jeg våkner opp av en lang søvn. Alt lyder nytt og ukjent.

Hva har skjedd? Jeg ser Tian Yi og meg der vi løper for livet hånd i hånd. Er det et minne? Skjedde det virkelig? Stridsvogner ruller mot oss. Det brenner over alt, og lyden av skrik ... Og nå? Besvimte jeg mens stridsvognene rullet mot meg? Er det fortsatt samme dag?

Da far lå på sykehuset og ventet på døden, var stanken av skittent sengetøy og råtne appelsinskall blant sterk nok til å skjule den gjennomtrengende eimen av rustne jernsenger. Når kveldshimmelen la seg mot vinduet, gled de skitne gardinene sammen med det gylne sollyset, og rommet ble en anelse mer gjennomskinnelig og fikk meg i det minste til å føle at far fortsatt levde ... Den aller siste ettermiddagen våget jeg ikke å se på ham. Jeg vendte meg mot vinduet og stirret på den røde plakaten, HEIS MARXISMENS STOLTE, RØDE FLAGG OG KJEMP TAPPERT VIDERE, som hang fra taket på sykehusbygningen ved siden av, og på den smale stripen av himmel over den.

De siste dagene han levde, snakket far om de tre årene han hadde vært musikkstudent i Amerika. Han nevnte en jente fra California som han hadde truffet da han var der. Hun het Flora, som betyr blomst på latin. Han sa at hun alltid så ned i gulvet når hun spilte fiolin, slik at han kunne granske de lange øyevippene hennes. Hun hadde lovet å besøke ham i Beijing så snart hun var ferdig med studiene. Men da den tiden kom, var Kina blitt et kommunistisk land, og ingen utlendinger fikk slippe inn.

Jeg husker den svarte, råtne jekselen i munnen hans. Når han snakket til oss på sykehuset, pleide han å stryke hånden over bomullslakenet og kateteret under det.

«Han er i virkeligheten bare en grønnsak,» sier en sykepleierske til høyre for meg. «Men den intravenøse væsken går fortsatt inn i årene. Det er et godt tegn.» Det virker som om hun snakker gjennom et munnbind, samtidig som hun river i et stykke musselin. Lyden dirrer gjennom meg, og et kort øyeblikk får jeg en vag fornemmelse av min egen kropps størrelse og vekt.

Hvis jeg er en grønnsak, må jeg ha ligget bevisstløs her en stund. Våkner jeg nå?

Jeg ser far for meg igjen. Ansiktet hans er utvisket, som om jeg ser det gjennom finmasket netting. Også far var lenket til en sonde da han trakk sitt siste åndedrag. Det venstre øyeeplet hans spilte, som en vindusrute, taket på sykehusbygningen utenfor, en stripe

himmel og noen greiner. Skulle jeg dø nå, ville de gjenlukkede øynene mine ikke reflektere noen verdens ting.

Kanskje jeg bare har noen få minutter igjen å leve, og at jeg har gjenvunnet bevisstheten for et kort øyeblikk før alt blir svart.

«Huff! Jeg kaster bort tiden her. Han vil aldri våkne.» Mors stemme lyder både nær og fjern. Den svever gjennom luften. Kanskje det var slik far hørte lyder like før han døde.

Oksygenmasken og plastslangen i nesen virket så overflødige i livets siste minutter. Hadde ikke sykepleierne jevnlig fjernet slim fra halsen eller helt melk i magen hans gjennom en gummisonde, ville han ha dødd i den jernsengen flere uker tidligere. Akkurat idet han var i ferd med å gli bort, følte jeg at øynene hans så på meg. Jeg nappet broren min i skjorten. Kakesmulene i hendene hans drysset ut over sengetøyet. Han forsøkte å klatre opp i fars seng. Nøkkelen han hadde hengende rundt halsen slo mot sengerammen. Jeg dro i remmen på lævesken hans med så stor kraft at den røk.

«Kom deg ned!» ropte mor med øyne som var røde av raseri. Broren min begynte å gråte. Jeg ble taus.

Sekundet senere ble far ett med det medisinske utstyret som omsluttet ham som et bur, og gikk inn i erindringen. Liv og død løp sammen i det indre av kroppen hans. Det virket så enkelt alt sammen.

«Han er borte,» sa sykepleieren uten å ta av seg munnbindet. Med skotuppen skjøv hun til side spisepinnene og bomulsdottene hun hadde brukt til å fjerne slimet hans med, så ba hun mor om å gå til resepsjonen og ordne med formalitetene. Hvis far ikke ble kjørt til likhuset innen midnatt, ville mor bli avkrevd enda en natt for sykesengen. Direktør Guo, personalsjefen i operaselskapet som foreldrene mine tilhørte, rådet mor til å søke om politisk rehabilitering for far etter at han var død, og sa at erstatningen kunne bidra til å dekke sykehusutgiftene.

Far sluttet å puste og ble et lik. Kroppen hans lå i sengen, like stor som før. Jeg stod ved siden av ham med klokken hans rundt håndleddet.

Etter kremasjonen stod mor på bussholdeplassen med boksen med aske i armene og sa: «Det siste faren deres sa, var at han ville at asken hans skulle begraves i Amerika. Snakk om høyreavviker! Selv ved dødens terskel nektet han å angre.» Da bussen vår kom, ropte hun: «Nå slipper han i det minste å leve i frykt!»

Hun satte boksen med asken under jernsengen sin. Senere dro

jeg den ofte fram og kikket i den før jeg gikk til sengs. Jo reddere jeg ble for asken, desto mer ville jeg se den. Mor sa at hvis en venn av ham skulle dra fra Kina, ville hun gi ham boksen og be ham begrave den i utlandet, slik at fars ånd kunne stige opp til en fremmed himmel.

«Du må dra utenlands og studere, gutten min,» gjentok far ofte da han lå på sykehuset.

Så, jeg er altså fortsatt i live ... Jeg ligger kanskje på sykehus, men jeg er i det minste ikke død. Jeg er bare begravd i min egen kropp ... Jeg husker dagen da jeg fanget frosken. Læreren vår hadde bedt oss om å fange en, slik at vi senere kunne studere skjelettet. Da jeg hadde fanget frosken, slapp jeg den nedi en glasskrukke, stakk hull i metallokket og gravde den ned. Læreren vår sa at mark og maur ville kripe inn og spise alt kjøttet i løpet av en måned, slik at det bare var skjelettet igjen av den. Jeg kjøpte et løsemiddel for å gni av de kjøttslintrene som fortsatt måtte henge fast i knoklene. Men før måneden var omme, bygget en familie som bodde i første etasje i gården vår, et kjøkken over hullet der jeg hadde begravd frosken.

Frosken må ha blitt et skjelett for mange år siden. Mens knoklene ligger fanget i glasskrukken, ligger jeg begravd i min egen kropp og venter på å dø.

En del av hjernen din er fremdeles i live. Du driver fram og tilbake mellom kroppen og minnene.

*Oversatt av Christian Rugstad
Aschehoug, 2010*

Mian Mian

棉棉

Mian Mian 棉棉 (f. 1970) er et ikon i Kinas alternative kulturliv og litterære undergrunn. Hun er en del av den såkalte syttitalstallgenerasjonen, og var en av de første i Kina med litterære skildringer av rockemiljøer, dopbruk og historier om sosiale utskudd. Mian Mian er mest kjent for sin roman *Candy*, en fiksjonell selvbiografi, som umiddelbart ble en bestselger i litterære undergrunnsmiljøer med sine rasende beskrivelser av mislykkede kjærlighetsaffærer, tilfeldig sex, selvmord og heroinmisbruk. Senere har *Candy* blitt oversatt til femten språk.

På grunn av sine kontroversielle skildringer av livet i kinesiske storbyer, prostitusjon, avhengighet, kriminalitet, seksualitet og svake ineffektive menn, anses hun som en kontroversiell forfatter.

Utdraget er hentet fra romanen *Panda Sex* som er oversatt til fransk, tysk og polsk. Boken er mindre utagerende enn den tidligere *Candy*, og skildrer skakkjørte forhold mellom menn og kvinner i en av Kinas mest moderne og ekstravagante byer, Shanghai. Boken er en slags collage av bilder, skrevet med et nøytralt, manuskriptlignende språk.

Panda Sex

Dedicated to all special tourists

By Mian Mian

- Last chapter -

I'm the famous Sergei.

My mother loved the Russian poet, Yesenin, so I was called Sergei. Many years ago, my girlfriend wrote me into her novel, using my real name. At the time, she never imagined that one day we might hit the headlines.

In *Panda Sex*, you'll find that this Sergei and that Sergei are different. But I'm Sergei. She was my lover, the part of my life I'm most satisfied with. I was the one she loved most deeply. Or rather, I still am.

She's not very good at making up stories. She's always had problems expressing herself. Actually we're all like that. In her eyes, I'll always have countless secrets. I understand her feeling that. But there's no way I can tell my secrets. There's no way I can tell certain secrets to anyone.

As far as our story goes, it doesn't matter how much she distorts it, she's still writing about us. For instance, when she writes that stuff about sex, a ray of light sometimes suddenly appears, lighting up the real and the fictional.

Six months ago, after the funeral of our close friend, I asked her to marry me.

I actually didn't propose formally, I just said, how about we get married?

She looked at me with those cat-like eyes for a very long time.

At that moment, the heavens intensified their seduction of the sun so mysteriously, it was unrecognisable. It shouldn't have been like that.

I carried on, saying lets go and register on Monday, then we can

go and buy air tickets to Miami!
OK, she said.

After that, we went a few places together. Before going out, she got out a lot of empty mini disks. A long time ago, she used to take a blue MD player everywhere she went, and when she was enjoying herself, she used to record the conversations of friends around her. It seemed like a way of making sure other people didn't record her. Or maybe she didn't need to worry about not remembering everything that had happened the night before. Anyway, carrying this MD player gave her a sense of security. Even if her machine or her disks jammed up at the crucial moment. And she never listened to the recordings she'd made.

Before going out, she also got out something I'd written years ago. She wanted me to read it to her. I did and she recorded my voice. Then she read a bit herself and recorded that too.

I didn't ask her any questions about her behaviour. She wasn't one of those women writers who from time to time feel like they're going to break down. I didn't think any more of it.

After she got the mini disks ready, she suggested we play "story-telling solitaire".

We've been through many major events together. For instance, drugs rehab, countless mental breakdowns, making films together and so on. We also shared some wonderful things, some beautiful feelings, some valuable insights. In many places, we overlapped and became the same person, and most of the time this feeling was positive and interesting. At times, however, it led to both of us feeling at a loss and even a bit frightened. When she suggested we play "story-telling solitaire", I knew she wanted to have a good talk to me. This was a game we discovered years ago in bed. She's an author and she likes fiction, and the game was a symbol of our love affair. When we played this game, we sometimes went days without leaving the house. When we were unable to communicate problems in the normal way, we'd play "story-telling solitaire".

Reality is always stranger than fiction. I don't know what our relationship was in our previous lives, but in this life, our passion was so complex that, even after so many years, we could still get anxious. What was all that about?

It was Friday evening. We went to many different places and slept very little. Most of the time we were out in town or in the car. We never stopped playing "story-telling solitaire". Her recorder never jammed either. On Friday evening we couldn't hold out any more, and we started smoking and binge-drinking. On Monday morning, we decided to split up. This was my suggestion.

Splitting up seems to be my speciality. My whole youth seems to have been defined by these intensely emotional moments. Each split was a different chapter in our mutual love.

I think this is the first time we've really split up. It feels appallingly quiet.

When she gave me the recorded mini disks as a present, I didn't realise she was editing while she was recording. It was only several months later when I played each disk through that I suspected she'd already decided to split up when she recorded them.

It was as if I'd suddenly discovered that most of humanity was not capable of loving anyone else or living with them. People had so many failings, and communication between people was so impossible. And love affairs always ended in darkness. Every ending came with so much darkness.

I can say for sure that Hong saw everything more clearly than me. Probably from the moment I proposed marriage.

Love affairs are like the Cold War. In love, people are spies. Spies are great at pulling the wool over your eyes. There's absolutely nothing you can be sure of. You can never, ever know if the other person's acting. Look at yourself; you've actually been acting all along too. You've been guessing at the other person. The tinier, the more inconspicuous the details in your memory, the more you take them out and pick them over. But that kind of analysis is all prejudiced and meaningless. This city has as many broken hearts as it has lights shining in windows. We're all lost, lost in a

wilderness filled with mirrors.

After that, we never saw each other again. Hearing about all the things she's been able to do, I feel like I'm in pieces, and I feel even more fragile when I hear she really misses me.

I know that if only she was willing, she could still set my pre-dawn fantasies on fire. We caressed each other countless times in the dawn of icy, snowy days. We still love every mysterious tear in the eyes of the other person. But, no matter how much we love each other, the whole relationship is like play-acting, so untrue, irrational and unhappy.

When it was my birthday, she sent me a small white framed mirror, wrapped in white paper on which she had written in small letters: live well, don't drink, don't cry and don't come and see me again.

I went back to room 804, Park Hotel, and in the beam of light dancing on the huge TV screen outside the window, I saw her again. Her expression was far removed from desire, she was my most loved actor, and this time she left me, taking the stain with her.

These recordings are an elegy to love, the darkness before dawn. Extremely precious.

We have always been people who sought the meaning of life.

The meaning of "every good kid deserves candy" is that eventually every child will arrive at the truth.

The repeated listening and arrangement of these recordings has been the saving of me.

These recordings are mostly conversations from the days when she and I played "story-telling solitaire". As for the content of our conversations, it was the characters we created in the game that talked. We also made recordings of people around us talking. I edited and made a very few necessary additions to the mini disks she'd already titled and sequenced. Most of the titles just said the date and place. I cut out a lot of inaudible conversation and surplus words. For instance, I cut out "said" and replaced it with a colon. I also cut really unacceptable content, like the conversations when we were making love. The section under my name was something

I wrote and added. I sent it to her and she wrote a section under her name and sent it back. The two pieces we read in the kitchen before we went out were numbered by her and appear as the last part of all the material she gave me.

26.05.2008, North Bund, Shanghai
"It's not good", by Depeche Mode is playing.

Translation by Nicky Harman

Murong Xuecun

慕容雪村

Murong Xuecun 慕容雪村 (f. 1974) er en av de nye, sterke stemmene i kinesisk samtidslitteratur. Han flytter mellom Lhasa og Beijing, og har bodd en rekke steder i Kina. Murong brakdebuterte som internettforfatter i 2002 med romanen *Leave me alone: A novel of Chengdu*. Romanen ble umiddelbart en kultklassiker blant den unge kinesiske middelklassen, og flyttet grensene for hva som var akseptert som litteratur. Romanen ble en av Kinas første litterære internett-suksesser og fikk mer enn fem millioner treff. Etter å ha blitt gitt ut med stive permer, og senere oversatt til engelsk, ble den også nominert til Man Asian Literary Prize i 2008. Boken er nå blitt oversatt til seks språk, og har blitt filmatisert og dramatisert i Kina.

Murong Xuecun fikk også mye oppmerksomhet for sin neste roman, *Dancing Through Red Dust*, hvor han gikk undercover for å avsløre korrupsjon og pyramidespill i deler av det kinesiske rettsystemet. For denne mottok han Peoples Literature Prize i 2010, men ble nektet å holde pristale på grunn av planlagte uttalelser om Kinas litterære sensursystem.

Utdraget er hentet fra Murong Xuecuns debutroman, *Leave me alone: A novel of Chengdu*, som gir et mørkt, humoristisk bilde av livet og kjærligheten i det moderne Kina. Romanen skildrer tre unge menn og deres tragikomiske kamp for å overleve i Chengdu, Kinas femte mest folkerike by. Til tross for sine ambisjoner i det nykapitalistiske Kina, begrenser trioens liv seg til meningsløse jobber, spillgjeld, drikking, dop og prostituerte.

Leave me alone:
A novel of Chengdu
Murong Xuecun

Chapter one

My wife, Zhaho Yuo, called as I was leaving work. She suggested that we try this new hotpot joint in Xiyan district.

"Your life is all about food", I said. "Like a pig's."

I was in a temper because Fatty Dong had just been promoted to general manager of the Sichuan branch. Fatty started at our company at the same time as me. His only talent was sucking up to people but now he was my boss and I felt depressed.

Zhao Yue said, "If you won't come, then I'll ask someone else".

"Screw someone else for all I care."

I'd barely got that out before she ended the call.

For a while I stood in front of the phone. I knew my wife hadn't done anything wrong but I wasn't in a restrained mood. Snatching my briefcase, I stormed from the building.

Chengdu in March is all dust and smoke. I bought a pack of cigarettes at a street stand and wondered where I could spend the rest of this gloomy Friday night. After much thought, I decided to try Li Liang.

Li Liang was one of my university friends. The second year after graduation he'd quit his safe job working for a state company and started a completely new career trading futures. In less than two years he'd made a fortune of 2 or 3 million yuan. Thinking about it, I admitted that sometimes you had to believe in fate. At college no one had foreseen Li Liang's talent for investing: he'd been little more than my sidekick.

My guess was that right now if he hadn't crashed out he was playing mah-jong. This was his favourite – really his only – recreation. One time at college, after thirty-seven hours of non-stop gambling during which he'd lost all his money and meal vouchers, he'd said: Chen Zhong, lend me ten yuan so I can get some food. Apparently he'd collapsed later in a small restaurant outside the campus gates.

When I arrived at Li Liang's there were three others at the

table – two guys and a girl. I didn't know any of them. On seeing me, Li Liang said, "Dude, there's beer in the fridge, DVDs in the dining room and a rubber doll in the bedroom that's never been used. Choose your pleasure!"

The others laughed.

"Screw you!" I said.

I put some money down and said, "What are the stakes?"

The girl sitting opposite Li Liang told me double or quits. Checking my wallet, I found more than 1000 yuan, which I guessed was enough.

Li Liang introduced his quests. The two guys were from out of town and were here to learn about Li Liang's futures trading. The young woman was Ye Mei and apparently she was the daughter of the boss of some construction company. I opened a can of beer and went over to check out her tiles. Ye Mei was wearing a red sweater and a pair of tight jeans. She had full breast and a very fine slim waist, and was jiggling and gulped down some beer to calm things.

After a few round, Li Liang got up from the table to adjust his hi-fi speakers and invited me to take his place. I immediately got mugged by Ye Mei's suite and lost 200 yuan. My luck continued to slide and a few rounds later the 1000 yuan was gone. I hit on Li Liang for some more money and he cursed and lobbed his wallet at me. At that point my mobile rang. It was Zhao Yue.

"What are you doing?" she said.

"Playing mah-jong."

"Having fun, huh?" She sounded cold.

I said it was OK, at the same time throwing out a tile.

"When are you coming home?" se asked.

"I might play all night, so don't bother waiting up for me".

She hung up without another word.

After Zhao Yue's call, my luck turned. I kept winning big. The two guys taunted me that such good luck in gambling meant I was due for some bad luck in my private life. They joked that I should watch out my wife wasn't screwing around. Smiling, I just went on stuffing their cash into my pockets.

At 3 am, when I had cleaned up for the fourth time. Ye Mei stood and said, "I'm out" There's something wrong here. I've never seen such disgusting good luck."

I took an inventory of my winnings and found that I'd not only got back the lost 1000, I had an extra 3700 – that was more than

half my basic monthly salary. On a high, I refilled glasses for Ye Mei and myself, then leapt up on the sofa and gave an impromptu recital of one of Li Liang's poems: *Life comes all of a sudden, fuck it!*

We'd started a literature society at university – I was the president, Li Liang wrote the poetry. It was the perfect front to bed many literary college girls. As Bighead Wang from our dormitory once said: Both your hands stained with virgins' blood.

Still, the situation at work was getting me down. I wanted to sleep but knew that I wouldn't be able to, and I'd wake up Zhao Yue if I went home. She'd ask where I'd been and we'd quarrel. The neighbours were tired of our fights, sick of the sound of smashing plates. But if I didn't go home there was nowhere to go.

I said, "Li Liang, let's hit the road! Big brother's gonna take you for some drinks, and we'll see this babe home."

Li Liang threw me his car keys, and said he wasn't coming. He asked me to drive the two guys to their hotel and then escort Ye Mei home. As we were leaving he warned: "Ye Mei, take care around him, he's not a good guy. His nickname is Flower-Destroying Monk."

Ye Mei laughed and asked if she could borrow a knife.

Li Liang said, No need. If he tries anything, just kick him in the balls.

It was deep night. As we passed the Qing Yang Palace, I suddenly remembered the first time Zhao Yue and I had gone there. With our eyes closed we'd played a game of reaching out to touch the blood-reed 'longevity' character on the wall. It had turned out that I was touching the oblique 'pie' stroke and she was touching the stubby 'dot'.

I'd said, You can enjoy your longevity since you got the 'cock'.

Zhao Yue had laughed her head off. Right now she would be asleep, and I imagined her cuddling a pillow, snoring, with the light on. Coming home after a business trip once, I'd found her just like that.

Ye Mei lit a cigarette and said, "Are you thinking about your mistress? You have an evil smile."

I said, "Yeah, I'm thinking of you. When we get these two back to the hotel, you come home with me, OK?"

"Unfortunately, I couldn't take your wife's slapping"

I smiled, and thought nastily that it was OK as long as she

could take me.

I've never been able to resist sexual temptation. Li Liang even wrote a poem about me:

*Tonight the sunlight is bright and beautiful
Dancing with hormones
Chengdu, your soft skin
Is like my sad mood
Walking naked in God's smile
I couldn't choose at Yanshikou in March*

Couldn't choose actually meant *unwilling to choose*. Li Liang had laid into me once, saying I wouldn't let even a pig get away. To make his point he checked off my girlfriends on his fingers:

I responded that he simply didn't appreciate women. For example:

- The PE teacher was tall, 177 centimetres, and her nickname was 'dark rose'.
- The restaurant boss was as plump as the famous Imperial concubine Yang.
- That waitress was hot. Her chest size was 36F, so she looked as if she was going to topple over when walking. If she did, her breasts would hit the ground before her face did.
- And don't you think my breadstick lover looked like that hottie Ning Dongdong in our class?

Li Lang just muttered, Dude, you're not picky at all.

After dropping off the two guys, Ye Mei and I were alone. I deliberately drove slowly, staring at her until she seemed uncomfortable. Her face reddened. When I smirked, she lost it.

"What's so funny?"

I asked if she was a virgin or not.

She glared "Too bad I didn't borrow that knife from Li Liang so I could chop it off."

In my experience, if a girl was willing to banter with you in this way it meant she didn't mind being seduced. Also, I'd read somewhere that women's resistance was at its weakest after midnight. Stopping the car with the excuse of adjusting the rear view mirror. I pressed against her. She trembled slightly but didn't

move away, and so I slid my arm around her slender waist. She protested. "You are bad. If you try that again, I'll have to get out of the car."

I sighed and reluctantly, withdrew my arm.

Then she murmured, "Who gave you the right to win all my money anyway?"

Hearing this I was elated and held her tight.

Translation by Harvey Thomlinson

Make-Do Publishing, 2009

Xi Chuan

西川

Xi Chuan 西川 (f. 1963) er en av Kinas mest internasjonalt anerkjente samtidspoeter, og har stor innflytelse nasjonalt. Han bor og arbeider i Beijing. Xi Chuan er også en kjent prosaforfatter og oversetter, og har blant annet oversatt Ezra Pound, Jorge Luis Borges og Czesław Miłosz til kinesisk, i tillegg til Olav H. Hauge sammen med den norske sinologen Harald Bøckmann.

Xi Chuan har gitt ut fem poesisamlinger, og en stor mengde tekster i litterære tidsskrifter. Han har vunnet en rekke litterære priser både i Kina og internasjonalt, som Modern Chinese Poetry Prize i 1994, han var på topp ti i Weimars International Essay Prize Contest i 1999 og den nasjonale Lu Xun Prize i 2001. Han har også vært gjesteprofessor på en rekke universiteter i Europa og USA.

Xi Chuan er en del av den såkalte "tredjegerasjons" poeter i Kina, som fulgte etter de kjente "tåkepoetene" som presenterte vestlig modernisme til kinesiske poeter. Xi Chuan har startet og vært redaktør for en rekke tidsskrifter, og er nå en av sjefsredaktørene for *Dangdai Gouji Shitan* (Contemporary World Poetry).

Sykkelen

Xi Chuan

Selv om sykkelen er en enkel mekanisme, gestalter den flere sider ved matematikkens og fysikkens skjønnhet, og er overhodet ikke underlegen andre og mer avanserte kommunikasjonsmidler. Innretningen med krank og kjedeoverføring har fratatt folk alle muligheter til å komme på ideer om en helt ny type sykkel basert på andre prinsipper. Enhver tings fullbyrdelse er nettopp slik. Siden sykkelen er blitt fullbyrdet, og siden den er tett forbundet med våre liv – man kan endog si at den er blitt bestemmende for vårt levesett – kan vi nesten anse den for å ha blitt besjelet med eget liv. Den gjør at vi kan knytte den opp mot personer som den prostituerte Sai Jinhua ved Qing-dynastiets slutt, det ubestikkelige gode sosialistiske mennesket Lei Feng og mange andre interessante mennesketyper. Den kjennemerker vårt samfunns økonomiske, kulturelle og politiske nivå. Betydningen av "sykkel" i leksika bør utvides. Vi bør legge til "Sykkelens mening er å stole på egne krefter, å befordre seg selv." Den er ikke kun to hjul og ei ramme, den lar tankene løpe fritt: Når jeg trækker min slitne, gamle sykkel gjennom støyende og trengselsfylte gater, får jeg ofte en fornemmelse av å ville ta av i fri flukt – fra å ha alles øyne rettet mot seg og stige opp mot den blå himmelen – hvis jeg bare trakk litt hardere!

Oversatt av Harald Bøckman
For Litteraturhuset

My Grandma

My grandma coughs, waking a thousand roosters.
A thousand roosters crow, waking ten thousand people.
Ten thousand people walk out of the village, the roosters in the
village crowing still.
The rooster crowing stops, my grandma coughing still.
My still-coughing grandma mentions her grandma, her voice
getting softer.
As if it were my grandma's grandma's voice getting softer.
My grandma talks and talks and then stops, shutting her eyes.
As if it were only now that my grandma's grandma really died.

On False Causality and True Chance in a Dark Room

In a dark room, I put my ear to the wall, listening in, but don't
hear anything stirring in the neighbor's home next door. Then
suddenly I hear someone next door with an ear to the wall as
well. Quickly I pull my ear back, sure to behave like an upright
and proper man.

In a dark room, I should not wake from a good dream while
my father wakes from a bad one. He reprimands me, and his
reprimands are valid; I turn introspective, completely loyal and
filial. I tell him my good dream, so he could have his own, but his
good dream was already forgotten in the bathroom.

After a brush with death an ascetic becomes a philanderer.

One handsome young man kills two handsome young men just
because they all look the same.

In a dark room I have a séance with smoke and mirrors. Some fool
really does walk in the door and kneel before front of me. I kick
him away, continuing my indulgence, when another fool breaks
down the door, wielding a butcher-knife to overthrow me.

In a dark room, I turn on the radio. Its melodramatic love story
awakens my self-pity. Just then a burglar crawls out from under
my bed, engages me in a discussion of the meaning of life, and
vows right then to turn over a new leaf.

An enthusiast of the *Analects of Confucius* refutes another

enthusiast of the *Analects of Confucius* to a bloody pulp.

Du Fu has received too much exaltation, so no other Du Fu could ever win anything.

In a dark room, I fawn over a dead man. He was not my ancestor but my neighbor. I create for him a life of glory, his cast-iron face flushed with pink. Many years later, I eat too much at the home of his grandson.

In a dark room, I make up a girl's portrait. An acquaintance says he recognizes the girl in the picture: she lives in the East District, 35 Springweed Lane. I find the place, but her neighbor says she's just left on a long journey.

Faced with an emptied grave the giddy graverobber has nothing to do.

With nothing to do the line cook goes back to his dark room.

In a dark room, my gold ring, passed down for three generations, rolls onto the floor, never to be seen again. Therefore I suspect that beneath my dark room is another dark room; therefore I suspect that everyone who ever wore a gold ring lives beneath me.

In a dark room, some guy comes in the wrong door but tries to make the most of it. He puts down his backpack, washes his face and brushes his teeth, and then orders me to get out. I say that this is my home, this is my lifeline, I'm not going anywhere. And so we start to wrestle in the darkness.

A Song of No Matter

Whether a fly is called "fly" matters not
 That its buzzing is getting louder matters not
 That it has a bellyful of ink and pisses blue matters not
 That it has decided to be an exemplary fly matters not

You and I make not a peep
 That the fly has flown away and someone else is in the room
 matters not

That he's chatting up a storm matters not
He says he's so smart they'll love him up in heaven, then leaves
Whether he'll be the smartest person in heaven matters not

You and I make not a peep

But not just you and I make not a peep
Nor do the telephone pole outside or its shifting shadow
That a kite has hanged itself on the telephone pole matters not
That we've run a hundred and eight thousand miles around the
pole matters not

Exercises in Thought

Nietzsche said, "Reevaluate all values," so then let's reevaluate the value of this toothbrush. Perhaps the toothbrush isn't a toothbrush? Or perhaps the toothbrush isn't simply a toothbrush? If we refuse to reevaluate the value of a toothbrush, we are reevaluating the value of Nietzsche.

Nietzschean thought, when we are in thought, makes us brazen and shameless. But does that mean that we aren't brazenly mimicking the singing of the sparrow, shamelessly mimicking the silence of white clouds? Does that mean that we aren't brazenly and shamelessly being brazen and shameless?

At times even if we can't figure out the whithers and wherefores, we still pretend to be in thought, like a fly crawling past one word to another, pretending to be able to understand a poem. Many people pretend to be in thought, proving that thought is a beautiful thing.

But the bald man doesn't need a comb, the tiger doesn't need weapons, the fool doesn't need thought. The person with no needs is practically a sage, but the sage also needs to count the rivets on iron bridges for diversion. This is the difference between the sage and the fool.

Nietzsche said that a person must discover twenty-four truths each day before he can have a good night's sleep. But first of all, a person shouldn't find that many truths, or the supply of truths in this world will exceed demand; secondly, anyone who

discovers that many truths would hardly be able to fall asleep at all.

So I guarantee you, Nietzsche never slept; or if he did fall asleep, he was a sleepwalker. A sleepwalker will never meet another sleepwalker. Nietzsche never met God, which is why he proclaimed, "God is dead."

But did Nietzsche ever meet Wang Guowei? No. Did he meet Lu Xun? No. Did he ever meet brazen and shameless me? Still no. So perhaps this Nietzsche never existed after all, just as the word "spirit" may mean nothing whatsoever.

Thought is like flying, though flying gives you vertigo, which is why I don't always want to be in thought. Thought is like a bad habit, though bad habits give you the full experience of life's flavor, which why I sometimes want to be in thought.

I demand that turnips, bok choy, and I all be in thought together, I demand that chickens and ducks and cows and sheep and I all be in thought together. Thought is a kind of desire, and I demand all ascetics admit it, and I demand all hedonists accept it.

Those exercising athletes, they exercise and exercise till they collapse from so much exercise. People who've see too much may as well go blind. To stop being in thought, you may as well think as much as you can. Think until you go stupid, so your incarnation as a person has not been in vain.

The depletion of a person, this was Nietzsche's work. To deplete a person, that is, to make him a superman, that is, to make him pull out all his lightning rods, and moreover to make him stick like a lightning rod out of the earth.

Regarding the principles of thought: 1. To be in thought in the hustle and bustle of the marketplace is one thing, to be in thought beside a stream is something else. 2. Thought isn't an exercise in filling in blanks, thought is making a fresh start. 3. Someone who has thought *ad infinitum*, even if he is a pessimistic cynic, will still clap his hands and laugh, and louder laugh all on his own.

Xu Zechen

徐则臣

Xu Zechen 徐则臣 (f. 1978) anses som en av de unge, litterære stjernene i Kina. Han har til nå gitt ut fire romaner, *Midnight's Door*, *Night Train*, *Heaven on Earth* og *Running Through Zhongguancun*, og kortprosasamlingen *How Geese Fly up to Heaven*. Han har en master i kinesisk litteratur fra Peking University og er redaktør for det litterære tidsskriftet *People's Literature*. Xu Zechen bor og arbeider i Beijing.

Xu Zechen skriver ofte om noen av de lavere klassene i dagens Kina – migrantarbeidere og gateselgere – og hans sparsomme, realistiske stil skildrer en hard kinesisk hverdag med tørr humor. Xu Zechen har vunnet en rekke nasjonale priser for sitt forfatterskap.

Utdraget er hentet fra den kommende oversettelsen til engelsk av *Running Through Zhongguancun*, et illusjonsløst og fartsfylt portrett av dagens Kina. Romanen skildrer livet til den unge mannen Dunhuang og hans mislykkede forsøk på å tjene store penger i hovedstaden Beijing. Han livnærer seg på å selge falske dokumenter inntil han blir arrestert og sitter fengslet i tre måneder. Senere innleder han et forhold den litt eldre Xiaorong som selger piratkopierte DVDer, og dras med ut i et eksentrisk og annerledes Beijing. Romanen ble utgitt på tysk i 2009.

Running Through Zhongguancun Xu Zechen

1

I'm out.

Dunhuang opened his mouth to shout; a dust devil rose up and filled his eyes, nose and mouth with fine grit; he was obliged to sneeze and rub his eyes. The little iron gate clanged shut behind him. He spat the sand from his mouth; the dust devil had moved on. Tilting his head back he looked at the sky, a blur of yellow dust behind which the sun glowed mild but rough, like a polished piece of ground glass or a copper mirror that had seen years of use. The sunlight had no power to dazzle but Dunhuang's eyes still teared up; it was sunlight, after all. Another dust devil leaned towards him and he dodged out of its way. This was a sandstorm, he'd heard of them on the inside. The past few days they'd talked of only two things: his getting out, and the sandstorms. While he was inside he'd seen the storms picking up, seen the yellow dust settle on the steps and windowsills, but there wasn't enough room to really kick up a fuss. If he could, he'd like to go back in there and tell that pack of old cabbage heads that if they wanted a real sandstorm, they'd have to get out into the wide open spaces.

Wild land stretched before him, a few trees showing new buds, no green grass to be seen. It must be buried in sand, Dunhuang thought, and kicked at the dried up weeds beside the gate—he peered around but still couldn't see a speck of green. Three months, for Christ's sake, and not one blade of green grass grown. He felt cold with the wind on him, and pulled a jacket out of his bag. He shouldered the bag and shouted:

"I'm out!"

The iron gate creaked and a head peered out. Dunhuang saluted it, then laughed, "What are you looking at? Back to your post."

The head glared at him, retracted, and the iron gate clanged shut once

more.

Dunhuang walked for twenty minutes, then waved a little truck over. The driver, with a first growth of fluffy beard, asked

where he was going, and Dunhuang said anywhere was fine, so long as it was inside Beijing. The driver dumped him on the west Fourth Ring Road; he was taking his truck to the Liulangzhuang automobile market. As he got off Dunhuang thought he knew this place, he'd been here before. He walked south, turned right, and sure enough there was a little corner store where he'd once bought Zhongnanhai cigarettes. The sandstorm aside, Beijing hadn't changed much. Dunhuang felt a little bit easier; he'd worried that Beijing might have transformed behind his back. He bought a pack of cigarettes and asked the young salesgirl if she still recognized him. The girl smiled and said he looked familiar. He said I once bought four packs of cigarettes here. As he was leaving he heard the girl spit the melon seed shells from her mouth and mutter:

"Lunatic!"

Dunhuang didn't look back—who's going to argue with someone ugly as you! He followed the road onward, knowing he must look like a jobless young tough; he started swinging his bag around and swaggering down the wrong side of the street. Walking on the wrong side wasn't illegal. He walked slowly, savoring a Zhongnanhai. Being inside was just like being home: it was hard to get a smoke. The first time he'd brought two cartons of Zhongnanhais home his father had been thrilled and passed them out to guests, solemnly telling them, Zhongnanhai, that's where the leaders of our nation live, they all smoke these. Where the leaders of our nation live. Dunhuang had only once passed the front gate of Zhongnanhai, on his way to see the flag-raising. He'd dragged himself up at 4am, Bao Ding cursing him all the while, saying: you can see the flag raising any day, why has it got to be a foggy day? It had been foggy, and they had to make a delivery that morning, but Dunhuang couldn't help himself. He hadn't been in Beijing long, was hanging around with Bao Ding, and apart from enormous heaps of cash his dreams were filled with the flag, fluttering in the wind. He could hear the clack-clacking footsteps of the ceremonial guard, passing in perfect union through his dreams. Flying along on a wrecked old bicycle he had passed a bright blurry gate, where a few guards might have been standing, but he thought nothing of it. When he got back and Bao Ding told him that that was Zhongnanhai, he regretted not stopping. He always meant to go back and take a closer look, but never got around to it. It was like Bao Ding said: You could go

any day, so you end up going no day. He'd never gone.

Dunhuang didn't know where he was headed; when he realized that it seemed terrifying. No place to go. The whole lot of them had gone in: Bao Ding, Big Mouth, Xin'an, and Sanwan with the lame leg. Hardly anyone he knew was left, he'd have trouble just finding a place to crash. And he was short of money, only fifty to hand, minus the nine he'd just spent on cigarettes. He'd follow his feet for now and worry about it tomorrow—he could always burrow in somewhere for a night. The sun was dropping steadily in the sandpaper sky, down towards the end of this street, looking more and more like a giant millstone weighing on Beijing's shoulders. As Dunhuang took the cigarette from his mouth he whistled a bit to buck his spirits; this wouldn't kill him. When he'd first come to Beijing, and gotten separated from Bao Ding, hadn't he slept a night against a concrete pillar under an overpass?

Obstetrics hospital. Zhongguancun Human Resources Market. The Bai Family Courtyard Restaurant. Earthquake Bureau. He looked up and saw Haidian Bridge before him. He hadn't come this way on purpose. Dunhuang stopped, watching an extended city bus run a red light under the bridge. He hadn't wanted to come here, actually, though there wasn't anywhere he wanted to go. It was beside Haidian Bridge where he'd been caught, he and Bao Ding. They ran all the way here from Pacific Digital City without stopping for breath, but still couldn't shake the police. They still had their stuff with them. If they'd known they weren't going to get away they would have tossed it all. He'd called to Bao Ding: it's okay, those cops are too fat to buckle their pants, but they turned out to be pretty nimble. A car cut them off in front, and it was too late to toss anything.

That was three months ago. It had still been cold then, around the New Year, the wind singing in his ears. As they were dodging and sprinting they'd nearly made two cars collide under the bridge. Now he was out, and Bao Ding was still inside. Bao Ding's left hand had gotten stomped by the police, Dunhuang wondered if he'd recovered.

Dunhuang turned onto another street, turned again. The wind picked more sand up off the ground and he ducked in under a building. The light was fading, it was almost dark. He swatted the dust from his clothing, and a girl carrying a bag like his walked up to him, saying "Want a DVD, mister?", pulling a handful of CDs from her bag. "I've got everything: Hollywood, Japanese, Korean,

domestic hits. Also, old classics and Oscar winners. Everything." She spread out the colorful packages for him to see.

Under the failing light there was something vaguely improper about those colors, but he knew that the discs were clean. Like the girl's face—dried out by the wind, but not bad looking. She seemed to be cold, trembling occasionally as if she were about to cry; a good girl. Dunhuang couldn't judge her age, maybe twenty-four or twenty-five, maybe twenty-eight, not more than thirty. Thirty-year-old female DVD-sellers didn't look like that; they would be carrying a child, and ask in mysterious tones, "Hey, want a disc? I've got all sorts; if you want porno I've got hi-def." Then they'd hurriedly draw the discs from the back of their clothing.

"I've got no place to watch them, anyway," Dunhuang said, and leaned back against the wall to let another gust of sand pass by.

"They'll play on a DVD machine or a computer," the girl said. "They're cheap, I'll give you six *kuai* a disc."

Dunhuang dropped his bag on the steps, wanting to sit and rest. The girl thought he meant to buy and squatted down with him, pulling a sheet of newspaper from her bag and spreading the discs on it. "They're all good, guaranteed high quality."

Dunhuang thought it would be churlish not to buy, and said, "all right, I'll take one."

"Thanks. Which do you want?"

"Anything, so long as it's good."

The girl stopped and looked at him. "If you really don't want one then just forget it."

"Who said I don't want one?" He was laughing at himself now. "I'll take two! Hell, give me three!" Worried she'd get suspicious, he hurriedly rummaged through the discs under the lights of the building. *The Bicycle Thief. Cinema Paradiso. Address Unknown.*

"Hey, you're a film buff!" Elation was obvious in her voice. "Those are all classics!"

Dunhuang said he didn't really understand film, he'd just picked them randomly. It was true: he really didn't understand film. He'd seen *The Bicycle Thief* before; he'd once heard a pair of college students talking about *Cinema Paradiso* on the bus, the boy saying it was good, the girl saying it was great; he'd picked *Address Unknown* just because the name seemed awkward, he thought it should have been *Unknown Address*.

The discs bought, he sat on the steps, looking at the neon lights of the building across the way. Four characters: "Hai Dian Chess

Academy." He'd seen that name many times before. He drew out a cigarette, lit it, and blew a cloud of smoke toward the sign.

The girl packed her discs into her bag and stood up, saying, "aren't you going?"

"You go on, I'm going to rest a bit." Dunhuang saw no need to tell a stranger that he had no place to go.

She said goodbye, walked off, and then came back to sit on the step beside him. Dunhuang unconsciously shifted his rear to make room.

"Got another?" She meant his cigarette.

Dunhuang looked at her in surprise, then passed her the pack and the lighter. She noted that Zhongnanhai were particularly mild. He had no cause to disagree. He'd crossed paths with many, many people, but they were nearly all transactions, for the sake of cash, and the girl's behaviour threw him off balance. He only panicked for a second, though—what could go wrong? The barefoot do not fear the shod. Whatever would happen, let it happen. Suddenly relaxed, he asked her:

"How's business?"

"Business is business. Weather's bad." She was talking about the sandstorm. It had driven all the idlers indoors, and it was mostly idlers who bought discs.

"Mmm." Dunhuang nodded in sympathy. The weather had plenty to do with his line of work, too. Rain or wind set the world scurrying; no one was in the mood.

She was no stranger to smoking, her smoke-rings were better than his. The two of them sat there watching the sky darken. The pedestrians thinned out. Dunhuang heard someone in a nearby bookshop saying, Close it up, who's going to buy books when the gravel's flying? Then the sound of a shutter door being dragged straight down to bang into the ground. "Flying gravel..." Hardly. Dunhuang did his best not to look at the girl. He wasn't sure how to talk to her, he wasn't used to lounging around with girls he didn't know, what exactly was this turning into? He wanted to leave.

"What do you do?" the girl asked him abruptly.

"What do you think?"

"A student? I can't tell."

"I don't do anything. I'm homeless." Dunhuang found that the truth was as easy as a lie.

"I don't believe you," she said, standing. "But so what if you are

homeless, let's have a couple of drinks. My treat."

Dunhuang smiled to himself. You've showed your hand now, I knew this wasn't your only profession. He'd never paid for it, but Bao Ding and lame Sanwan had, and he had a basic handle on women. But a girl like this in that line of work... it was a little heartbreaking. But he talked himself around—the newspapers said many of these girls were actually college students. Even college students, such a grand thing to be, were doing this. Dunhuang thought again about those furtive women with their babies, selling discs.

"Why don't I treat you." Dunhuang put on the generous act. Dead hogs don't fear a scalding; what the hell. "I don't know this area, you pick a spot."

Translation by Eric Abrahamsen

Paper Republic (www.paper-republic.org), 2009

Yiyun Li

李翊雲

Yiyun Li 李翊雲 (f. 1972) vokste opp i Beijing, og flyttet til USA i 1996 hvor hun nå bor og skriver. Hun er aktuell på norsk i høst med novellesamlingen *Skinnende gull, glitrende smaragd*. For to år siden kom også hennes debutroman *Omstreifere* som har høstet storslåtte kritikker internasjonalt. *Sunday Times* skrev om boken at den er "et mesterverk ... får deg til å tenke på Tolstoj og Tsjekhov."

Yiyun Li belyser ofte hvordan myter, politikk, historie og kultur krysser det personlige i sine internasjonalt anerkjente og prisvinnende bøker. Hennes historier og essays har vært publisert i blant annet *The New Yorker*, *Best American Short Stories* og *O. Henry Prize Stories*. Debuten hennes, novellesamlingen *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*, vant Frank O'Connor International Short Story Awards debutantpris og ble shortlisted for både Kiriyama Prize og Orange Prize for New Writers. Yiyun Li underviser til daglig ved University of California, Davis.

Utdraget er hentet fra novellesamlingen *Skinnende gull, glitrende smaragd*, en samling historier fra dagens Kina. Bakteppet er et Kina i rivende økonomisk utvikling som har skapt nye og uventede situasjoner for vanlige menneskers hverdag. Under overflaten av rikdom og muligheter strever enkeltmennesker med å orientere seg i det moderne landskapet, og deres skjebner bestemmes like mye av historiske omstendigheter som av egne valg.

Skinnende gull, glitrende smaragd Yiyun Li

Godhet (utdrag)

EN

Jeg er en førtien år gammel kvinne som bor for meg selv i den samme toromsleiligheten jeg har bodd i hele livet, i en forfallen bygning i utkanten av Beijing som trues med rivning av statssubsidierte totalentreprenører. Bortsett fra en tur til et billig bad hotell sammen med foreldrene mine den sommeren jeg fylte fem, har jeg ikke reist stort; jeg tilbrakte et år i en militærleir i det sentrale Kina, men bortsett fra det har jeg aldri bodd hjemmefra. På college, etter et par mislykkede forsøk på å overbevise meg om hvor viktig det var å være en del av fellesskapet, sluttet veilederen min å bry seg om hvorvidt jeg var til stede eller ikke, og sengen jeg var blitt tildelt ble overtatt av de fem andre jentene på sovesalen og koffertene deres.

Jeg har ikke giftet meg og har naturlig nok ingen barn. Jeg har få venner, men nok av bekjente, i og med at jeg aldri har flyttet fra nabolaget. De fleste av dem er en generasjon eller to eldre enn meg, og jeg syns det er beroligende å omgås dem; det går aldri en dag der jeg føler at jeg er alene om å eldes.

Jeg underviser i matematikk på en tredjerangs ungdomsskole. Jeg er ikke spesielt glad i jobben min eller i elevene, men jeg har lagt merke til at selv den ynkeligste antydning til oppmerksomhet jeg gir dem, alltid blir gjengjeldt av noen med respekt og takknemlighet og til tider en uforklarlig hengivenhet. Jeg synes mer synd på de barna enn jeg setter pris på dem, for jeg kan se hvor de er på vei med livene sine, og det er en fryktelig ting, selv for en ufølsom person som meg, å se den trøstesløshet som ligger på lur i andres liv.

Jeg har ingen hobby som får meg ut av leiligheten på fritiden, og jeg har ikke TV, men jeg har et rom fullt av bøker som er minst et halvt århundre eldre enn meg selv. Jeg har aldri i mitt liv såret noen – eller, om jeg utilsiktet har kommet til å gjøre noen noe vondt, har den påførte smerten vært av den mest ubetydelige sorten, den som er glemt i det øyeblikket den kjennes, hvis den

da er mulig å kjenne i det hele tatt. Men det kan da ikke være noe lykkelig liv, eller mye liv i det hele tatt, sier du kanskje. Hvilket godt kan stemme. "Hvorfor er du ikke glad?" Selv den dag i dag kan jeg, dersom jeg lukker øynene, kjenne løytnant Weis finger under haken idet hun løfter ansiktet mitt opp mot vårkvelden. "Si meg, hvordan kan vi gjøre deg glad?"

Jeg har aldri kunnet svare på disse spørsmålene, som ble stilt meg for tjuetre år siden, men nå spiller det heller ingen rolle lenger; løytnant Wei døde nemlig for tre uker siden, førtiseks år gammel, gift med en papirgrossist, mor til en tenåringsjente og tidligere soldat i folkets frigjøringshær, avdeling 20256, en stilling hun fratradte da hun var førtitre og allerede angrepet av en ondartet svulst. Hun sto omtalt som major Wei i kunngjøringen fra begravelleskomiteen. Jeg vet ikke hvorfor akkurat jeg fikk brev med beskjed om at hun var død, begravelleskomiteen – det var en slik komité som hadde sendt meg brevet med den justerte rangen – måtte ha funnet navnet mitt skriblet ned i en gammel adressebok og trodd at jeg var en venn hun ikke hadde sett på lenge. Jeg lurte på om kunngjøringen ble sendt til de andre jentene også, selv om det neppe er mange av dem som har samme adresse fremdeles. Jeg husker den dagen for lenge siden da det kom invitasjon til løytnant Weis bryllup; da tenkte jeg at det ville være siste gang jeg kom til å høre fra henne.

Jeg gikk ikke i begravelsen, slik jeg heller ikke hadde gått i bryllupet, enda begge deler fant sted to timer med tog utenfor Beijing. Det er slitsomt å reise i bryllup, for ikke å snakke om i begravelse, der man blir stilt overfor fremmedes tårer og, enda verre, må komme med gjentatte kondolanser til mennesker man ikke har noe forhold til.

Da jeg var fem, kom en omreisende kramkar til nabolaget vårt en søndag med en bambuskurv full av nyklekkede kyllinger. Jeg gikk og trasket etter faren min på vår ukentlige utflukt for å handle rasjonert mat, og da kramkaren plasserte en kylling i håndflaten min, en myk og varm liten kropp som skalv konstant, begynte jeg å gråte før jeg i det hele tatt rakk å spørre faren min om han kunne kjøpe den til meg. Vi hadde ikke mange penger i vår familie: Faren min jobbet som vaktmester, og moren min, som hadde vært syk så lenge jeg kunne huske, jobbet ikke i det hele tatt, og jeg lærte tidlig å hjelpe faren min med å telle mynter og småsedler før vi dro av sted for å handle. Det var antakelig hjerteskjærende for de som kjente til vår situasjon, å se hvor,

fortvilet faren min ble, for to damer tilbød seg å kjøpe to kyllinger til meg. På veien hjem advarte faren min meg med mild stemme om at kyllingene var altfor unge og neppe ville leve mer enn en dag eller to, men jeg bygget et rede til dem i en skoeseke med avisstrimler og matet dem med bløtlagt hirse og, dagen etter, da de virket syke, aspirin oppløst i vann. To dager senere døde de, først den jeg hadde kalt Prikk og merket med blekk i pannen, så Sopp, like etterpå, og da faren min gikk for å hjelpe en nabo som hadde en vask som ikke var tett – moren min var sjelden til stede den gangen – stjal jeg to egg fra kjøkkenet, knekket dem forsiktig og vasket bort hviten og plommene. Men samme hvor hardt jeg prøvde, greide jeg ikke å få kyllingene til å passe inn i eggeskallene igjen, og jeg kan ennå se for meg Prikk, med halve skallet på snei over blekkflekken som en morsom liten hatt.

Siden den gang har jeg lært at slik er livet også; til syvende og sist er hver eneste dag som en kylling som nekter å returnere til egget sitt.

Jeg var atten år gammel da jeg gikk inn i hæren. Løytnant Wei var tjuefire, noe jeg nå anser som ungt, men den gangen virket hun mye eldre, et helt liv unna meg. Den dagen jeg ankom leiren, som lå i en middels stor by herjet av hepatitt og lommetyver, kom jeg med en halvfull koffert. Hæren hadde sendt en omfattende liste med utstyr vi ville få utdelt: tannbørster, håndklær, vaskevannsfat, feltbestikk, termosert laget skulle ha på deling og uniformer for alle sesonger – vi pleide å spøke med at hadde hæren visst hvilken BH-størrelse vi brukte, ville de ha skaffet oss det også, farget i samme grønnfarge som sokkene og underbuksene våre.

Noen få menn og kvinner i uniform satt og slappet av under et tre. Jeg hadde tatt et nattog for å dra hjemmefra og ankomme leiren så tidlig som overhodet mulig. Faren min hadde fulgt meg til togstasjonen og trykket hånden min høytidelig gjennom det åpne vinduet idet toget fløytet avgangssignalet; moren min var ikke blitt med; hun var syk, sa hun, akkurat som jeg hadde visst at hun ville si.

Etter at jeg var blitt registrert, kom en kvinnelig offiser som var omtrent et hode høyere enn meg og hadde kortklipt hår, bort og presenterte seg som løytnant Wei, troppsjefen min. Hun hadde på seg en strågul uniformsskjorte som var kneppet helt opp, mørkegrønne ullbukser og et høyrødt slips. Jeg vek ikke under det skarpe blikket; jeg hadde, til da, levd med min mors nådeløse øyne. Ikke noe glansbilde akkurat, men grei nok – noen ganger

mens vi spiste, satt moren min og studerte og kommenterte ansiktet mitt, og om kveldene, når faren min jobbet nattskift, pleide hun å komme med bemerkninger om de tilstrekkelig velutviklede kurvene mine. Jeg hadde lært meg til å ikke svare; da kunne jeg bli helt gjennomsiktig, så når moren min skrellet av plagg etter plagg med blikket, fantes det ikke annet enn luft under.

Etter at jeg hadde skiftet på meg uniformen, ga løytnant Wei meg ordre om å vaske brakkene. Skal bli, svarte jeg; skal bli, løytnant, rettet hun. Skal bli, løytnant, svarte jeg beredvillig, og hun så på meg en lang stund før hun snudde seg, som om denne mangelen på trass fylte henne med avsky.

Jeg var den første i vår tropp som var kommet, og jeg gikk innimellom køyesengene og studerte navnene som var teipet til metallrammene. Kompaniet holdt til i en treetasjes bygning, der hver tropp disponerte en avlang etasje med køyesenger langs begge veggene, som igjen var delt i fire lag av vaskeservanter og skrivebord. Jeg skulle dele køyeseng med en jente som het Nan: Vi hadde hvert vårt hvite laken over en tynn stråmadrass og to mørkegrønne tepper, det ene litt tykkere enn det andre, som var brettet slik at de liknet tofu skåret med en skarp kniv. Det fantes ingen pute, men vi skulle snart lære oss å tulle sammen klærne vi hadde med hjemmefra – kjoler og skjorter, som var forbudt i brakkene – til puter om kvelden. Ved sengen min var det et vindu ut mot gården, der noen trær jeg hadde til gode å lære navnet på, sto på en rett linje, med grenene strukket oppover på uniformt vis.

Etter en stund kom løytnant Wei tilbake og dro håndflaten over gulvet. Du må ikke tro at dette er hjemmet ditt, sa hun, og la til at jeg bare burde belage meg på å slite av et par lag med hud. Så ga hun meg ordre om å vaske gulvet en gang til, og jeg svarte:

"Ja vel, løytnant."

"Høyere," sa hun. "Jeg kan ikke høre deg."

"Ja vel, løytnant."

"Jeg kan fremdeles ikke høre deg," sa hun.

"Ja vel, løytnant," sa jeg.

"Du trenger ikke skrike meg opp i ansiktet. Et respektfullt og tydelig svar er alt vi er ute etter."

"Ja vel, løytnant," sa jeg. Hun stirret på meg en lang stund. En soldat utgytte svette og blod, sa hun, men aldri tårer. Jeg ventet til hun var gått før jeg tørket ansiktet mitt med ermet. Det var

håndtrykket til faren min gjennom det åpne vinduet jeg hadde grått for, sa jeg til meg selv og svor på at jeg aldri skulle gråte igjen så lenge jeg var i hæren.

Oversatt av Vibeke Saugestad
Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 2011

Zou Zou

走走

Zou Zou 走走 er forfatter og redaktør i *Harvest Magazine*, et anerkjent skjønnlitterært tidsskrift med base i Shanghai. Hun arbeider blant annet med å plukke ut nye, unge stemmer. Tidsskriftet er kjent for sin høye standard og kunstneriske karakter, og flere av de mest innflytelsesrike samtidsforfatterne i Kina har hatt sin første tekst på trykk her.

Zou Zou har gitt ut to romaner, to kortprosasamlinger og en rekke essays i ulike litterære tidsskrifter. Zou Zou bor og arbeider i Shanghai.

Brakkebyen

Av Zou Zou

Frem til jeg var atten og dro på universitetet, bodde jeg i en brakkeby i bydelen Xuhui. Ofte sto jeg bak glassruten og så dem komme og gå. Jeg husker en gang, da yngstesønnen til de venstre naboene våre løftet hodet sitt plutselig, kikket opp på meg og lot blikket feie raskt over ansiktet mitt. Det kom så brått på at jeg rykket til, tok et skritt tilbake og krasjet med midjen mot siden av skrivebordet.

Mor og far i den familien kom begge fra Yancheng i naboprovinen Jiangsu. Først kjøpte de denne trange lille brakken på én etasje. Straks de fikk litt penger mellom hendene begynte de å bygge på. I 1996, da brakken skulle rives, hadde den ene etasjen blitt til tre. Far i huset var stor og feit, og smilte til naboene da han gikk ut for å svale seg om sommeren. Men denne havnearbeideren, ble det sagt, slo konen sin rett som det var bak lukkede dører. Konen var mørk og mager, og gikk til enhver tid rundt med en olm mine, en mine som når som helst kunne eksplodere i raseri. Sammen fikk de fem døtre og én sønn.

I en slik familie levde den yngste sønnen ut sine bortskjemte barndomsår. Han var vel ti år eldre enn meg. Senere ble han en av brakkebyens beryktede småkriminelle. Bare én gang var han inne hos oss. En sommerettermiddag før jeg skulle begynne på skolen, kom han inn med en ulvehund. Den gangen hadde ikke brakkebyen fått innlagt vann ennå, og moren min hadde dratt på pumpestasjonen for å hente vann. Døren sto åpen, jeg satt og lekte for meg selv oppå sengen.

Sengen var bygd opp med mursteiner, slik at sengetøyet ikke skulle bli fuktskadet av vannet som rant inn etter regnskylleene om sommeren. Den var ganske høy, husker jeg, og massiv. Hunden stakk tungen ut mot meg. På kommando fra nabogutten la den labben lett på sengekanten. Jeg krabbet opp og trakk meg bakover, til ryggen satt klistret tett opp mot veggen.

Det ville blitt et interessant bilde, hadde noen hatt et kamera og trykket på lukkerknappen den gangen. Det ville vært i svart-hvitt, og mørkt som rommet var, ville man kanskje trodd at det var

skumring allerede. Gjennom årenes gang ville jentas ansikt blitt visket bort. Utviskingen ville gjort bildet slørete, slik at skrekken i øyeblikket ikke ble fanget opp. Jenta verken gråt eller skrek. Hun sa faktisk ikke ett eneste ord. Bildet ville bare minnet om én ting: den store guttens ensidige glede. "Fra stor glede fødes sorg", sier vi på kinesisk, og i seg selv kunne gleden hans vært et symbol på det.

Neste gang jeg så ham igjen, ansikt til ansikt, var jeg en kvinne mot slutten av tyveårene. Han hadde avsluttet en syvårig karriere som fengselsinnsatt, og tredd inn i de middelaldrendes rekker. Jeg følte aldri at jeg hadde hundeskrek, det var bare en ørliten slags angst, en angst som fikk meg til å trekke langt unna når jeg så dem. Brakkebyen, ble det sagt, var bygd på en massegrav. Det kunne virke som den buktet og strakk seg endeløst frem i alle retninger, men om den så var svingete som en alpevei, munnet hver eneste smågate ut i de samme to utgangene på motsatt side.

Jeg gikk fem år på barneskolen i Pingjiang-veien. En stund trodde jeg at den eneste grunnen til at jeg gikk der, var at det var den som tilhørte området. Brakkebyen gjorde at kontakten oss imellom tok slutt da vi var ferdige på barneskolen. Moren min gjorde alt hun kunne for å oppdra meg til en mønsterelev, og selv i første klasse gikk jeg rundt med en ambisjon om å bli forfatter. I klassen befant jeg meg nesten på motsatt ytterpunkt av de andre. Siden kom jeg også inn på det som var byens prestisjeskole den gangen: Shanghais Ungdomsskole Nr. 2 i Yongkang-veien.

Men på tross av det var jeg fremdeles et barn av brakkebyen, helt til dagen jeg begynte på Fudan. Det var i dette kummerlige lille rommet jeg bodde. Og de syv årene jeg gikk på Nr. 2, oppdaget jeg et annet ytterpunkt jeg dannet motsatsen til. De kom fra Taiyuan-veien, Wuyuan-veien, Wukang-veien og Kangping-veien. De var rike og privilegerte. Og jeg, jeg var det motsatte av dem.

Da jeg hadde tatt fatt på voksenlivet, hendte det at jeg kom til å tenke på de jevnaldrende barna i brakkebyen. De var nok som meg, tenkte jeg, de jobbet hardt for å skape seg en tilværelse i denne enorme byen. Men egentlig hadde selv jeg, som fylte moren min med stolthet, ingenting godt å melde. Hver dag gikk vi ut en eller annen vei. Vi tok t-banen, fullførte arbeidet vårt, for så å ta t-banen tilbake til veien vi kom fra. Vi dukket opp, vi forsvant, vi var ikke annet enn et navn, et mobilnummer. Ved slutten av måneden betalte vi noen regninger. Plutselig begynte jeg å savne brakkebyen igjen. Der følte folk en tilhørighet til hverandre. Selv

min stive, hovne mor kjente sine naboer svært godt.

Neste gang jeg møtte nabogutten igjen, ansikt til ansikt, var det nok en gang en ettermiddag. Da jeg så ham denne gangen, var det tåkete og uklart til å begynne med, som første gangen jeg så ham. Da så jeg ikke annet enn den ulvehunden. Han sto ved siden av det fæle dyret, i det trange rommet vårt. Jeg klarte ikke å se ansiktet hans tydelig. Jeg senket hodet, reiste meg på tærne, men før blikket mitt rakk å fange ham opp, hadde moren min rasende jaget ham ut døren. Det jeg derimot husker veldig klart, er lyden av latteren hans. Den var lykkeligere enn noe annet. Fordi moren min avbrøt den, hang en overrasket "øøhhhh" igjen etter ham.

Neste gang han fanget oppmerksomheten min, var da jeg gikk på videregående. Antikriminalitetskampanjen det året fikk ham dømt til syv års fengsel, for statistrollen som utkikksmann under et ran. Som sin far gikk han med den samme singletten tre av fire årstider, med den ene forskjellen at hans var rød. Om sommeren, når han kom hjem for dagen, hadde han på seg et par pilotbriller. Da han tok dem av, så jeg et ansikt like tøft og kult som en filmstjernes. Jeg ble overrasket først, så trakk jeg meg inn bak gardinene.

Den dagen tok jeg Linje 1 på t-banen og kom ut fra Shanghai Sørstasjon. Jeg så meg rundt, i håp om å finne en motorsykkeltaxi jeg kunne ta. Da jeg hadde kommet bort til krysset og tatt en sving, fikk jeg et glimt av ham. Han satt overskrevet på en motorsykel som sto der, parkert og blottstilt i solskinet. På den ene siden av ham satt et par andre syklistere på huk og tok seg en røyk. Jeg gikk bort til ham, hadde helt glemt hvor bekymret moren min en gang hadde vært. Han hadde på seg hjelm, men ikke solbriller. Mens han så på meg, banket han lett på sykkelen med knokene. Du kunne forstå denne bevegelsen på flere vis; kanskje var det rastløsheten man fikk av å drive dank, kanskje var det en slags vennlig invitasjon.

"Er ikke ofte du kommer tilbake", sa han.

"Tar ikke motorsykkeltaxi når det er kaldt ute", svarte jeg.

Han tok av seg hjelmen. "Kjenner du meg igjen?" spurte han. Jeg nikket. Selv navnet hans husket jeg fortsatt.

I 1996 forlot jeg brakkebyen, sa farvel til ungdomslivet og kom til universitetet. Jeg måtte gjøre noe *spesielt*, tenkte jeg, så jeg begynte å lete etter ting fra barndommen jeg kunne skrive om. Med det ble jeg en forfatter. I verkene jeg skrev, begynte jeg med å fortelle om det jeg faktisk hadde opplevd. Senere begynte

jeg aktivt å glemme, og fortalte meg selv, på bedragersk vis, at først *slik* skapte man kunst. Siden skjedde noe sånt eller noe slikt. Mange ting skjedde. Og mens de skjedde, ble den en gang livlige brakkebyen til støv og forduftet.

Så, for en uke siden, spurte en redaktør om jeg ikke hadde lyst til å skrive en artikkel om Shanghai. Plutselig kom jeg på brakkebyen igjen. Den ettermiddagen gikk jeg langs Sørlige Shaanxi vei i retning av Zhaojiabang vei. Hvorfor vet jeg ikke, antagelig fordi jeg ville at skrivearbeidet skulle gå lettere. Langs hele veien lå det motebutikker. Det var tidlig høst i været, verken kaldt eller varmt. Jeg kom i godt humør av å gå der slik. Med ett følte jeg at kanskje, kanskje, hadde jeg gjort meg fri fra det stedet for godt.

I dag må jeg ta fantasien til hjelp, skal jeg komme i sinnsstemningen jeg var i for atten år siden. Det var angst. Angst fikk de aller fleste i brakkebyen, en type angst som jeg nå har mistet all erindring om. En etter en begynte folk å miste jobbene sine. Jeg vek unna blikkene til de voksne. Ingen av dem hadde penger, de var udugelige, de dugde ikke til annet enn å gjenta noen bevegelser. Stedet de før måtte hjem til om kvelden, satt de nå inne i, dag ut og dag inn. Brakkene var dårlig belyste, og ble svært fuktige om høsten og under regntiden. Den gangen var jeg redd for at en dag, når familien min håpet at jeg skulle forsørge dem, så ville jeg miste jobben min, og være ute av stand til å støtte dem økonomisk.

Om en person aldri bekymrer seg for fremtiden, eller hva som vil skje når han eller hun er gammel og mister førligheten, om den personen mener at tryggheten alltid vil være der for ham eller henne, ja, da kan jeg med si deg med en gang at den personen ikke er fra en brakkeby.

Da redaktøren min hadde lest artikkelen, sa han til meg: "Når jeg leser dette, tenker jeg på kilden til smerten i romanene dine ..." Noen ganger vil du ta vare på alle minnene. Andre ganger vil du bare slette dem bort til intet.

I dag er ikke brakkebyen noe sted å se. I krysset ved Vestre Jianguo vei og Søndre Shaanxi vei ligger nå Wutong Garden, et stort og høyt leilighetskompleks. Når folk snakker om stedet, sier de at "det er så fint der, med alle parasolltreene langs gaten". Disse høye bygningene har visket vekk alle merker etter et liv jeg en gang har levd.

En venninne av meg flyttet inn dit etter at hun giftet seg.