

**HAN Bo**  
Selected Poems

**Mudanjiang City**

The snow began to fall, the train entered the station

The director agreed it should begin like this:  
the lens dreams of her riding a dark cloud  
back to her home town, her young musician's fingers  
at this moment fasten the reins to the dark cloud,  
dreamed by another lens  
as steam. The drunk locomotive  
plunges the derailed rider into the harbour.  
In the steamy bath house she dreams that the lens has  
opened an unexpected abyss, just for her.

She awakes, she discovers  
the world enveloped in steam

Cutting away to a scene of winter swimming  
the director hopes the river water can also be seen  
in her dreams, changing into the corner of a bathhouse,  
the snowflakes just like the steam.  
The lens makes her stand up straight  
on the bridge that straddles the river, watching  
her younger self, with her father,  
leaping into the dark morning soaked in its icy water.

The north wind blows, the girl returns home

Three days two nights, the train helps her  
find the dark night anew, resting her head on the  
darkness above the snowy ground.  
Back to dreamland, she dreams of her delicate  
un-swollenred fingers lingering on the  
piano keys, playing "Even Hong Kong can be like the  
South Pole, day after day sunlit nights without end"

... ..  
Sunlit nights, she is awoken by  
the poet, those lines of poetry

The director sends her a  
love letter. She has no way to recall the owner  
of the crooked handwriting which poet surrounded by

warm water and foam [it came from]  
She can only use her fingers to remember  
their bodies, maybe.  
Occasionally, she permits the verse  
to flow into her own body.

Maybe the letter was instead a durian  
that arrived with her on the same train, juice  
and smell already dried out by the journey

### **An Afternoon of Self Assessment**

One has to accept fact that the leaves fall  
in an immutable] world, the forest park  
again meets late autumn amusing itself  
One has to admit a falling leaf,  
see its next life in the echoing scream of its descent

The indolent browser  
has no intention of opening the drifting leaf;  
he expects a later arrival  
a more vulnerable alienation  
the first snow covering the fragrant corpses

One has to accept  
the arrival that no power can stop, and abandon explanation  
a palace that receives an untold number of falling leaves  
containing an unreckonable death, autumn's  
last sequence

From the trees' confrontation one studies articulation  
I've plucked enough deviating words,  
verdurous revolutions, delicate setting suns  
One has to master acceptance  
of purposeless sacrifice in the air

## The Story of the Revolutionary Song

Constant poisoned words of approval  
Another late autumn, wind and rain, the protagonists drift to the ground

Peel away the eulogies  
let youth be weak, in a stupor, dreaming of victory  
above the Yellow Sea, youth is  
merely fumbling for the  
light

Longing to cast an image of the fabulist,  
to whitewash an illustration of their early years  
the youth is exhausted  
The first sentence of  
that book of didactic tales

Above the yellow sea, 10,000 meters in the air, the denunciation has long ago digressed

Youth has been delivered back to the womb, in the passenger cabin  
suspended, the contrived will to fight  
arrested,  
the descent the spasmodic sob of those who feel wronged

## A Bus: Two Sisters

The older one, she sawed up  
his legs. The younger  
stuffed him into a burlap bag  
and piled it on the porch. In the snow drift  
he looked just a sack of odds and ends

The round-faced one opened her legs  
like a bird spreading its wings. The long-faced one  
perched on the seat, left leg  
pressing down the right. Their all-season skirts  
as short as the joys of spring

The older one, pinching the wine glass  
savors the harvest of the severed legs.  
Although it's not a lot of money, all things considered  
she can pour herself a full glass  
and cut a few slices of sausage and bacon

The round-faced one looks over the chair beside her.  
He will probably be the balding god, arriving  
in the deep night. He said, "Let there be light", and so:  
a wig, leather shoes, handbag, perfume, underwear  
and a cell phone on which she talks all she wants

The younger one is also learning  
to pour herself full, rain-drenched pine  
lying in a decaying saw-mill surrounded by chrysanthemums.  
She fell in love with a coarse-mouthed model worker.  
After he gets off work, he hides his bonus in a sock

The long-faced one, today she's tired.  
Her god isn't on the bus  
She wants to rest, goes to buy a magazine  
phones her mother again, and says  
a lecturer proposed to me, I'm not sure what to do

The long-faced one only wants to fly a bit longer,  
wings of distilled liquor  
just spread. The younger one  
still wants to fasten on feathers of red wine, and loiter  
in the low sky crowded with customers

The round-faced one, an impoverished  
angel, in the mid-winter of a business trip to the world of men  
still must bare her legs. The long-faced one

still wants to put her navel on display, to watch, smile,  
exhibit a sample of her benediction

The older one, hearing the tires  
outside the window, crushing the fresh snow  
just like... Twenty years ago, that  
night when she only wanted to phone,  
only wanted a night not to let her midriff catch cold

The long-faced one, as if seeing  
the north wind grasping a hacksaw, scattering  
dirty white sawdust beneath the vehicle window.  
The road undulates, business is slack,  
twilight years... But there's comfort in the wine glass

The younger one of course believes  
her god, and those who look like him, as well as  
midnight passengers of her god's age.  
The money hidden in the sock cannot escape  
the bright eyes of one who has conquered love

The round-faced one when she steps over the  
odds and ends almost falls; the car breaks  
then skids, overturns, and rolls beside the road.  
She stands persistently imagining  
a bird, how it can disguise itself as sawdust

### **A Banquet of Knots**

I don't like eating rope  
I said, I don't like it

Is that a dish?  
That's all rope, tail in mouth

I'm very sorry, he fastened his tie  
The dish has broken, only a rough sketch is left of dinner

But no wonder you don't want to taste the secret  
His fingers within the coil, gently waving in the air

Extending tongue into snare, this way  
No one knows you are tasting the secret

I extend my chopsticks

There is a vortex in the coil, a mouth I cannot see

She uses force,  
grabs the throat of the chopsticks

She wants to chat with you, he said  
She's hungry, she thought you wanted to feed her intimate secrets

Carefully licking his fingers  
he surreptitiously watches the chopsticks, they are already suffocating

You, have you written a novel? Do you know  
how to weave a story without flaws

She, an exceptional novelist  
My finger, this is invented by her

Her head for a time drawn into a story she has woven  
A secure knot tied around her neck, as around that pair of chopsticks

I feed her my secrets: I  
am a rope whose body has gymnastic skill

If she is a china dish, I  
can stand straight, and let her spin on my head

I never expected her to be rope also  
holding tail in mouth, looking from afar like a circular china dish

She says, come, this is not the first time  
Let me knit a pair of gloves for you

But it was her first time  
the first time she tied a slipknot

in her weaving, I go in and out  
She needs a story, I need her

She asks: A snake needs another snake to hang itself with  
I reply: Life is your invented prisoner

I ask: How many onlookers do you need to weave into this game of knot-tying  
She replies: Invented, starving banqueters

I, I don't want to eat rope  
I said, I don't want to eat rope anymore

He raises a finger, imitating a stiff rope  
Afterward it shall once again be suddenly hidden in the palm, exploding with a click of

the fingers

What does this mean? I said  
If there is only rope, I'm leaving

It has no meaning, he spreads his palm  
She and I, we weave our separate dreams in the same knot

It truly has no meaning. I only heard that  
the starving, they have all slipped out of the knotted rope

## No Admittance to Minors

Clasping a liquid hand, drifting.  
The sea water does not know I am also sea water  
its nakedness pushing my nakedness  
attempting to wash me up on the shore.

I drift from one self  
into another, I clasp  
my own hand. I have not forgotten the liquid path  
winding around the submerged reef, from Shanghai to Inner Mongolia.

I am stranded on the beach. Waves break,  
lapping at my face, as if to extinguish a candle beneath  
the water. This is a callow  
beach, in my memory a fork in the road never marked.

Red tide. I hear, in the rented tent  
a man and woman take off their swimming costumes, using the expression in their eyes  
to change the viewpoint. You're fatter. Yes, and  
you are older. When I was young you didn't see red tides.

Did you spot that bulldozer? And the labourers  
shouldering spades, walking up the beach?  
Are they hurrying to clear the bathing area?  
You are still so naïve, watch carefully

They are loading their spades with film.  
With the bulldozer's every pile of kelp, the camera lens is pushed closer toward us.  
don't forget the kite above your head,  
it is nailed to the sky for a purpose, completely motionless.

From the dunes running toward the waves  
a naked boy, clasping the string of a drifting kite.  
His manhood sleeps in the sea breeze  
like the kite in his hand, suspended in the air

An observational composition tripped him,  
the boy fell, choking on mouthfuls of seawater. The sea  
this theme is too broad, too cumbersome, even a plastic bag  
blown by the wind becomes a leitmotif.

His mother tried to sell me corn, in her pocket she held an  
announcement from the evening paper soliciting articles. She couldn't see me  
but insisted on declaring to me: it's getting windy.  
Yes, the wind. Few people can ride the wind you know.

The sea breeze was cut to shreds by the wheels, a bicycle with 28-inch tyres

charging into the rough draft of the composition. She, youthful, grasps his young waist, sitting behind him she cries out, be it at his rushing into the sea, or at his attentions bestowed before the gathering darkness.

In the sea water, he clasps her hand drifting.  
He points to the kelp on his head for her to see, this part I can describe: the night swimmers can barely raise their heads to breathe.

The sand is also good, she raises her head and squeezes her body into another bold motif. The first thing she prepares is the midday background: his fingers hold the sand imitating the draining grains, heaps upon her body those most romantic treasures.

The sand clasping my hand, drifting.  
The sand does not know I am not sand. But I have already sunk into the concept of the beach, pushed by the sea breeze clasping the hand of sand, plotting a composition.

Let's go out, don't stay in the tent all day, I want to go in the water, we should wash. No, I want to bury you, let the sand cover your intimate secrets, then go together to eat seafood.

No, I don't want to eat seafood, last year it was here that I ate oysters, I almost couldn't get home after.  
On this stretch of beach, everywhere there are coils of kelp, rubber, soap bubbles, and that greenish black stuff of a

child never to be born!  
Mother, the kite has come down! It's already been in the sky for a long time, it's surely tired so we should let it come to earth, I'll make a castle for it.

She, youthful, helps him dig a youthful city moat. I have slid in the ice-cold gap between her toes, clasping sand, drifted in her sometimes open sometimes closed palatial chamber. His youthful hand weaves

a wreath of kelp, he resolves to surpass the boy whose manhood drips, and in her name construct the grandest castle, moat and monument on the beach, even an imagined underwater emperor's mausoleum.

The waves lap at my back, pull away my hand that clasps sand. The mother who has sold all her corn grabs the boy's clutched hand. She uses the evening paper to box his ears:

The tide is rising, and you're still playing!  
People only live once, the grass and trees die every fall.  
Only a few get an opportunity, are lucky enough to ride  
the swelling ocean, eh?

Death clasps the hand of the child, drifting.  
The mother clasps the boy's hand, using all her effort to swim toward  
the shark nets. Don't be afraid, use your body as a kite.  
Carefully observe your own feelings, when you sink.

Clasping a liquid hand, the kite  
drifts toward me as I lie on the sea bed. I ride the liquid  
bicycle, skirting things that have already happened, delivering to him  
the collapsed source material in the waves.

On the sea bed another beach accumulates. Never was a man born  
that mentioned their next life between the lines: that is  
a dark stretch of waterway, on the bank only air  
soaks up the slow time, he doesn't know at all

You are also her him. He clasps her hand  
and he spreads out a map – You've never been to Inner Mongolia  
The road sign dissolves at the fork in the road, your last drop  
of liquid inspiration, crosses the surface of the sea, dripping into another drop.

I turn towards a place it is not worthwhile  
to go. The sea water discovers I am also sea water.  
Its nakedness pushes me to digress. I am  
clasped by a liquid hand, drifting.

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*Translated from the Chinese by Jiang Bin*

## Dropped into Wilderness

They say, you have to come into contact with mother earth  
That is to say, temporarily touch the root of things

Embracing chicken duck pig dog, you shrug off the air  
sunk in the mountain track

Yet it is only three days, the root of everything continues down  
You cannot catch up with the nervous shoots

The air entangles your swollen feet, three days just gone  
and the stones in your rucksack have again become balloons

They say, in the end, you abandon mother earth  
For three short days, the sky felt like it was not a vacuum