

Heavy Snow

Thick-falling a heavy snow
transforms the hinterland Qinling Mountains trail
into zigzag
imitations of time and running water.

The gold miner exits the pit.
Snow makes him more peaceful, dim.
Snow's his old acquaintance.
He's seen plateaus of snow,
plain snow,
800 meters underground snow,
O'er the fields we go dashing snow,
inner-heart-never-melting snow.
Embedded in his body, pieces of snow
become the Big Dipper.

Eastward flows the Han river, rumbling
its parts composed of snow.
No matter how fast it runs destiny
is a return to stone.
Wherever it flows it deposits rulers' and Buddhists' *sarira*.

Just as great music has the faintest notes, the Qinling Mountains fade.
A train digests a man in its stomach,
running even more speedily than North winds.
The gold miner returns to his workman's lodging
where he pushes the feedlot's snow-bound door.

Xia River

That day I go to Beijing from my hometown.
After walking a steep slope, I come to the bank of the Xia River.
The snow is flying overhead. Mountains and rivers are all white.
The most outdated things
become brand new in heavy snow.

Suddenly, I remember
I've been away from home for many years.
The man standing on the river bank is a mere token.
People brought by the water have been taken away by the water.
Only the white head of the reed
year after year remains.

Across the river,
on the way home from school when I was a third grader,
I stole three peaches for my sister who had whooping cough.
Later I left. She stayed in the southward wind.
She was thirteen.

When I turn away,
snow falling on Xia River
thickens.

A Rural Primary School

My 10-year-old niece told me
her school has only 40 students.
That is a complete primary school.
From kindergarten to 6th grade, there are seven classes.
I understand her small concerns.
Her worry is a kite's worry
about the spring breeze.

Thirty years I haven't given up
such a wish: to go back to primary school,
receive handouts on an oak wood desk,
back to playgrounds filled only with children's voices,
re-listen to winds blowing feathers.
Three rows inside a brick building.
No incandescent lamps only praise and a longing for lights.

Now I'm standing outside the wall.
A banner painted on cement reads:
"Welcome to inspect and guide the work."
This is the old land also another province.
I have no primary school to go back to,
even the possibility of writing a book of failure is lost.

A Piece of Cloud's Gone Swiftly
—a poem dedicated to Liu Yun

A person's swiftly gone,
just as swiftly as he'd arrived that year.
This day the cloud on Nanluo River,
desperate, austere,

gone, implying one's tired of his post.
In silence he traveled alone,
said,
life's good times
hold another's toast.

*For how many years,
you'd been fishing in vast darkness
for a piece of white,
not knowing
you were the white itself?*

Let it go.
Let go of disease and bitterness.
Let go attempts to chase and shape vapors.
Let go the night and day of flesh.
One's given name and surname, dusted
to their origins,
humbled into dirt.

It's Winter

In the morning, I turn on my cell phone.
A friend from faraway sent
a picture of heavy snow.
Winter's really come.

I once wrote "Five Poems of Autumn,"
but only the beginning.
Now they're still on paper
like a station without passengers
at the intersection of Huanhuai Road.

Here at a huge recycle station,
what I do every day
is pick new clothes from a pile of old clothes.
I choose some for myself, by the way.
I've got two big boxes already.

Looking back,
what I've done half my life
is choosing winter clothes.
Enough to wear for ten lifetimes.