

## **Black and White Pebbles**

Long ago, in Tibet there was a bandit  
Named Pangong Gya. After years of crimes  
He repented and shaved his head to become a monk.  
His practice was simple:  
For each kind thought, a white stone was placed on the ground,  
For each bad thought, a black stone was laid down.  
When all stones turned white, he became  
The Venerable Lama Pangong Gya.  
In 2015, I came to Tibet,  
Saw many stones at glaciers, Gobbies, and riverbanks,  
Giant boulders, small pebbles, all ground down  
By wind and water.  
I remember Pangong Gya's story,  
How slow the river flows, peeling evils like skin,  
How fast the wind blows, holding kindness like a punishment.  
A pair of slaughtering hands finally  
Received the blessing of little pebbles.  
Black and white, each tiny move ,  
Could cause an avalanche in a faithful heart  
Down the rolling steppe. Cold fingers, distant heaven  
And hell follows, not too far, not too distant.

## Awaken

When I woke up, you were still sleeping, I listened to birds singing alone.  
Then you wake up, I'm no longer the man listening to birds, just  
Someone accompanying you, what separated us  
Is the bird song and your sleep, and I can't  
Connect them, or bring the bird singing

Into your dream, it's hard, so hard to  
Describe all this, but had I woken you up,  
I'd have been the man listening to birds with you, not  
The man listening to the singing, alone.  
--Fortunately, the world hasn't changed, except for me

## **Mirror**

The mirror holds no memory.  
It doesn't get excited by things.

It practices letting go all its life,  
Smiles, luxury clothes, angry eyes and smirks...  
The drowned may reappear on the other side of the mirror,  
Turned around by hands or rejection.

The mirror always stands on the side of the world  
No rising or falling, no controlling;  
Faced with so many joys and sorrows,  
It doesn't give advice, or get involved.  
When everyone is gone, it stays,  
Awaiting next approaching person,  
In a deep, silent space.

## **Old Bell**

Hanging, still, as if  
No longer care whatever flows past.

Knocking gently, one can still hear  
Tiny sounds struggling inside the iron  
Slowed down by long silence.

It awakens only  
When it's rung hard  
By a bell ringer, gritting his teeth.  
The iron boils, in brilliant agon, and the hammer  
Rising in the sound waves, seeking the chest of things.

## **Crack**

It starts as a whole.  
An unprepared heart suddenly  
Breaks into this bank and that.  
Some learn to build a bridge,  
Some learn how to make boats...

An invisible spirit controls everything, training  
Excellent sailors for the distant journey, until

It is broken into two  
Halves, separated  
By a white blank.

Each looks complete:  
Each looks as if no crack ever existed.

## Trees

There were many trees around the old house, the oldest  
One was a thorny elm, its trunk empty inside,  
But still blooming in white every spring.  
Two birches in the front yard provided thick shade,  
Grandpa and uncle sat under the trees, discussing  
How to find a wife from far away for the disabled son.  
One birch was felled later, to make coffin for grandpa.  
Five years later, the other fell for the uncle.  
Outside the village, there used to be an apricot orchard  
All gone gradually, except for the last tree  
Standing by grandpa's grave.  
I visited my village a few years ago. My nephew had turned  
My old home into a new house, old beams from old house  
Scattered around, black, rotten.  
Those old beams, all useless, unwanted,  
The whole village is surrounded by a strange green, new  
Willows, bead trees, plane trees...and sounds of rustling.

## Well

By the wheat square outside the village, there were  
Two mud huts, old, crumbling.  
Three strangers lived there: an old couple  
And their beautiful daughter.  
There was a well on the southside.  
The daughter went there to fetch water daily,  
A metal bucket in her hand, black long braid,  
Eyes shining with light when she looked at you.  
For a third-grade boy, the light  
Felt like my second life.  
I drank water from her bucket, listening  
To her humming.  
I couldn't understand her song, only felt its sorrow  
As if the song had a well deep inside.  
I heard she dated more than  
One lover...  
Oh, as a stranger, what love did she ever experience?  
Was it mixed with her terror for life?  
Like her belly, getting bigger that fall,  
Impossible to cover up, till finally  
She jumped into the well—filled with rumors.  
Cops came twice, but found  
Nothing serious.  
Oh, all these years, sorrow  
Never left me. In quiet moments  
Something would fall inside me  
With a thump,  
As if my heart dropped into the water.  
--I remember how sweet the well water tasted,  
And her face, eyes, songs,  
The metal bucket in the deep of her singing  
And the cold, bitter taste in the dark well

## Two Deaths

His name was Jianshe, six years old, when he died of  
Worms in his gallbladder. I remember him clutching his belly  
His handsome face twisted from agon, his back  
Pushing into the thorns of a tree trunk.  
His parents were mute, all they had was poverty,  
No money, medicine, or words.

Her name was Wang Meijuan, died thirteen years ago,  
Age 28, because of the house, her alcoholic husband and his affairs...  
She drank half bottle of pesticide, writhed in pain all night  
In the village clinic. She couldn't be revived.

The two deaths has twenty years of gap  
In between. They took away some of the pain  
With their bodies, so that our world is not  
Overcrowded with sorrow.

They went to the same elementary school with me, same age, same class.  
In the other world, they have a 22-years of gap with their ages.  
I talk about them today, because  
I'm walking by their graves. Their tombs  
Are close, and it takes only three minutes  
To visit each other, in the other world.  
Oh, if there's another world,  
I hope they'd meet up.  
--the dead can't die again.  
I hope they'll recognize each other, and experience  
Happiness they had never tasted in this world;  
Maybe, one can be a son, and the other  
Can be a doting mom.



## Remember One Winter

Thick snow on the tile roof, and Mom sewing by the door  
Threading needle in and out of the thick shoe sole.  
Some sparrows came to search for food, then flew away.  
The sun was shining, wind blowing from high sky  
With the scent of maple.  
Winter was quiet that year. Dad was making some furniture.  
Dry vines on the walls zigzagged, as if longer than our destiny.  
Time moved slowly, snow dripping, melting all sorrows.  
I was teaching in Liuji Town, killing my time with poetry during the break.  
The end of year was coming. Little sister would get married soon,  
But little brother still working in a Chongqing factory. Mom  
Went out of the yard from time to time, to see if he was coming home.  
The bus from Xuzhou came and went along the gravel road.  
When dust fell, the snow on the fields seemed whiter and quieter.  
At distance, grandparents' graves appeared slowly—  
They're gone for many years, and rarely remembered.

## Tree

If a tree sees something,  
Its body won't change,  
As it stands outside the matter of things.

Nothing ever surprises  
The tree. When it feels  
It's about to become a witness  
It grows new branches

You think you see the tree  
But do you really see the tree?  
It wasn't born for us,  
It won't die for us;  
Inside its heart,  
Something else is running.

## Tree

Lovers came here to tangle, old people  
Came here to remember.  
When nobody is around, its crown hangs alone,  
Its trunk stands like a forgotten column of history.  
Once I dreamed of its roots  
Like a bunch of ascetics—they've been  
In the cave for so long,  
Even the light from my dreams excited them.  
Not every tree is a sage, I know.  
Some will die from crazy laugh, some will  
Die from the guilt. So some trees  
Chose to keep living secretly, locking themselves  
With other worlds;  
Some learned how to walk in the fallen leaves,  
How to handle the extra passion.

## The Storyteller

The story teller is telling stories by the fireside.  
The red toon tree stands in the yard, its neck  
Covered with snow.  
In spring, the tree dried and died. Someone said  
It eavesdropped too many stories.

The fire in the stove burned red, opening up  
The locked secrets of the stories. Even knives  
No longer feel cold. When it enters the heart warmly  
It feels more like peace than murder.

Youngsters grew up in the snow.  
When spring came, they went to the city, seeking  
Work, drinks and girls, till they all vanished.

After many years, the storyteller will say  
His story came, half from his master, the other half  
From nightmares—every winter, he'd become  
A corpse, only the fire  
Can bring him back to the dust world.

“Because we do things to enter  
Other people’s dreams,” he emphasized.  
“Those made up stories will come true  
In the end (I saw a fire burning  
In his eyes). For example  
You’re alive, but you died long ago.  
A story entangles you, making it hard  
For you to untangle.  
But it’s easy to make you vanish in a story.”

## On the Side of Highway

Going home, my car comes to a traffic halt  
On the super highway. I come out for a smoke, see  
A grave, not far from the road.  
A man is busy between the tomb and tall grasses  
Burning paper money, then firecrackers.  
I can't see his face or the tombstone.  
The sound of firecrackers is a bit muffled.  
Who is he mourning? Dad or ancestors?  
Or someone dear who passed too early?  
A white sedan drive towards him  
Through the wheat fields.  
We say the dead rest in peace, but not always so.  
Some have to be awakened from their dreams  
By firecrackers. Some were buried before the highway  
Came, before cars zoomed by their resting place,  
Towards distant places they had never seen,  
Making whooshing sounds or something strange.  
It's almost Chinese New Year. So many people are rushing home.  
The grave stays silent, and the dead tree, winter wheat, snow—  
All silent. The sound of firecrackers  
Deepens the silence.  
The white sedan stops, a man steps out,  
Greets the other. They sit down  
On a rock, smoke, chat...  
They seem to be the only people in the fields  
Who understand the need of the deceased.  
The traffic starts moving again. My navigation  
Flashes a few villages' names: Li Tai, Zhao Jia Valley...  
But no grave appears on the map.

## Jiangli Village

A small village with a small lake, and occasional visitors.  
Last year, I saw an elder here,  
Drowned in the water, vertical, like a Japanese doll.  
His son ran over from the fields to fish him out.  
His body was heavy, slid back into the water a few times  
As if he were still alive, trying to hang onto the water.  
His son looked pale, but his hands seemed strong, steady.  
    (There' s so much to do, done with gritted teeth,  
Before one can cry)  
Finally, his body was dragged out and taken away  
A puddle left by the lake, like an expanding birthmark.  
I stood between the old house and murdering lake :  
On my left is the falling house of peace  
On my right, a calm lake of mirror, collecting  
Reflections of the village, and the remainder of death

## **Sugarcane Fields**

One day, you may pass a sugarcane field  
Like passing a poor man's dawn.  
Life is bitter, but sugarcane is sweet.

No matter what happens in the world, it stands sweet,  
Delivering sugar into our day  
Into our daily coffee.  
Sugarcanes rustle, guarding  
A poor man's faith as he holds bitter life on his tongue  
Only sweet words come out of his mouth

The sugar plant is not far from the fields.  
How powerful is the press machine: squeezing out sugar, spitting out dreg.  
When the surge slows down, the steel and its power  
Knows something that sugar or farmers don't know.

Someday you may pass the field.  
In the thin mist, sugarcane seedlings pop from the soil,  
Leaning against last year's cuts.

## Outside Jiayu Gate

I know what the wind can do, what I can't .  
I know the blowing wind is more mysterious than water and stars.  
I know someone is missing in the wind, with his cry, his wings and warm bones.  
I know how many lights are burnt out. I also know  
Human and beast, including human nature, comes from the same night.  
My knowledge is insignificant, perhaps, so is the coldness I've experienced.  
In the kingdom of wind and Gobi, the hammer of destiny is blind. The stones  
Do not pray, they stay silent, their bodies covered with holes of pain.  
--all these years, I stay as a guest:  
Believing in pieces than the whole. Holding a heart  
That repeats its journey, I've knocked on every door of every matter.



## Notes on Pingwu Mountain

I love the broken mountain, its steep cliffs  
As much as I love its history.  
Layers of rocks lean over, and I love  
Its formation made in a rage

...Before the echoes end, the earth  
Rises. I love the force cracking in midair,  
Its memory captured  
In the starry scars

I love its peak, and boulders rolling  
From the top—how they rush down  
The valley with devotion: a heart, broken,  
In love with calamities, live or dead.