**Sickbed Notes**

**Zhu Ti**

X month, X day.

Night came, but I did not sleep well. The sky just brightened when Hua woke me up. He gently shook my head and said to me, "Ti, I had a dream."

"Eh, what dream?"

"I dreamt of myself, I was wearing armour and holding a long spear, striding an excellent steed. I was a medieval knight!"

"Is that it?"

"There’s more. Listen to me, eh ~ the metal of my armour was emitting light! My long spear was springing with a fervor to move, my excellent steed raised its head and neighed, my blood was boiling! I felt I must go to a war. I must go to a massacre..."

"Then, of course you are going?"

"But just at that moment, just as I brace my armor and grasp the long spear, urging the excellent steed... Ti, you know, beside me, miraculously, a beautiful colorful snake blocked my way forward."

"Ai, then, you should throw it off!"

"I threw it off, I believed that I could throw it off, but it tightly entangled me. It made me have no way to leave it. Because of its beautiful scales, I could not hurt it…"

...

"Ah, such a vicious and beautiful snake!"

Hua finished talking and just walked out.

Laying on the bed alone, I could see myself in the big mirror on the table. I say quietly: "Ti, are you a beautiful snake?"

I discover my inappropriateness. I troubled Hua.

If one step is wrong, then everything is wrong. From start to finish, I think like this: love should not be a kind of tumor. If love cannot make a person happy, that love should be abandoned.

X month, X day.

Today, Hua is very excited.

After dinner, Hua sat next to my bed. He drinks tea while telling me the story of the film *Red Bean Grows in Southern Country*.[[1]](#footnote-1) I cannot clearly remember how many days it has been since I have gone to a cinema. Of course, I really like to listen to Hua’s voice, especially if it is a lovely story.

When he finished speaking, Hua turned on the pedestal lamp.

I know, night has already come

Hua brushes against the shade of the green lampshade, saying to himself: "I am very touched by the words of this writer's wife. Yes, a person’s life should not just be for oneself, it should also consider other people..."

I do not know Hua better than now but I understand very well that Hua has been suffering lately. I am the seed that conceives his pain.

"Yes, give up. Hua, if you should give up, you must give up.” I said it like this.

I do not want to see this kind of expression on Hua's face again. I desperately block my eyes tightly with the palm of my hand, changing what is in front of my eyes to a horrible darkness…

X month, X day.

In the morning, I drank a little milk.

The doorbell rang when the mailman delivered letters. I treasure the letters one by one as I read them. It is as if I got close to those unforgettable hometown relatives and friends living in the vast Central Plains. I felt a breath fill my chest and lungs...

Here, I know that he vomited blood.

Looking at the sunlight, I think: Why use the violence of life to conquer this little child? He is still young. He still has his faith. Every unfortunate thing should not besiege him...

But he vomited blood?

I think to write him a little something, but again I cannot write. I am very dizzy, as such a terror of life threatened me. Before I went to sleep, I felt my fingers trembling, lightly.

X month, X day.

Today, the sky is not bright yet. I just wake up.

Looking at Hua sound asleep beside me, his lips lightly open and close, and two eyebrows are tightly gathered in the middle of the bridge of the nose to pile up some wrinkles...

I should love Hua. When he loves me, I want to love him, but when he does not love me, I want to love him still.

Perhaps this is the determination of love!

Then, I look at this narrow universe. This little room around me is like a prison without bars, with a few tired-out people wriggling, in the night lightly flapping their wings.

I remember and take a look at the dim light of the night.

Hua turns painfully to the side.

I simply dare not move.

X month X day.

I read Ding Ling's “Wei Hu” once more.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Such a story always moves me. Yes, I should forgive and emend towards people who abandon me in life. No, that is not abandonment, it is the inevitable end of true romantic passion. From this, I thought of Hua again.

Perhaps such imagination is inappropriate. But these days he is worrying me, giving so much anxiety and pain. It makes me anxious and anguished. I really do not know ~ why should I think like this? But I cannot help but think like this again.

I have no way to handle my own heart.

X month, X day.

The old photograph album constantly reminds me of the declining years of life. This is a prophecy of loneliness.

Ah, youth is like flowing water!

So much time in emptiness with sky blue memories. Even tiny specks of friendship from the launch of my infancy at school have been severed. Enthusiastic dreams have also scattered in the wind.

Sad, grey days. A day, a day. Ah, the candlelight of life.

X month, X day.

The more I am about to leave, the more I cannot refuse to think of him.

I understand that my cherishing these memories is not without rhyme or reason.

Anxiety and uneasiness compel me to walk on the Big East Bridge Road. I stand on Big East Bridge Road and look at the river's water, looking at group after group of shameless peasants extravagantly exchanging pitiful old-fashioned enjoyments.

What is life? I carefully think.

People who cannot surrender their lives, always working for life, and people in the lower levels of life constructing consoling dreams…

People are swarming in front of my eyes, you guys!

Do you, you also have your own destinies?

X month, X day.

Noon. I lie beneath the south window and listen to the Catholic church bells ringing out noon.

So melodious through the paper window.

Life should have its faith. Now, I feel the loneliness of a person with no faith.

I can neither take a nap nor quietly read a book. My heart is hollow…

X month, X day

Like a ghost, I stand silently in front of the window and look at the moonlight.

Pale white walls, pale white window paper...

It is so late at night. Hua never came back. I think sorrowfully: perhaps Hua will never come back to this little room because his dreams must come true one day.

Quietly, I say to myself: "Ti, leave Hua, you have to live."

My fingers squeeze tightly, trembling.

A clear sound of a knock on the door knocker.

Someone walks out, uttering a gravelly question.

Thinking of a crying mood, I run to the bed.

I hear the sound of Hua ascending the stepstones...

My tears flow incessantly.

“Bingta ji” (Sickbed Notes)

*Chinese Osaka Daily*, 1 July 1944

Translated by Norman Smith, uploaded January 2022

1. *Hongdou sheng nan guo* is a 1944 Chinese film starring Bai Guang, Yan Hua, Li Hong and Guan Hongda. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ding Ling (1904-1986) was one of the most famous woman writers in twentieth century China. “Wei Hu” is a 1930 novella about a young Chinese male writer who returns from the Soviet Union and is forced to make a choice between literature and revolution; he chooses the latter. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)