

# lament of Liu Ch'e . . . while elsewhere-- *by strannikov*

## **Liu Ch'e's lament for Li Furen**

in her silk sleeves is silence sheathed.

each jade tile sprouts jade dust.

in this room soundless cold.

leaves in fallen piles bar the door.

could her consummate soul hide here?

can she hear my heart hold its breath?

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## **grievance from the jade staircase**

why, look! the jade stairs sprouted pearls hours ago  
—half the night gone, my gauze stockings are soaked through!

once home, I lower my glistening reed blinds—  
the autumn moon the brightest white pearl of dew.

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### **her beautiful toilet**

grass waves blue by a river blue.  
in a willow garden lush shade

drapes dark the young woman's small house  
with the lone window, the white door.

the beauty powders her face red  
lightly lightly with her white hand.

after the courtesans' house—here,  
ignored wife of dissolute lout,

absent, missing dissolute lout  
who left behind an empty bed.

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### **the friends' leavetaking**

where the peaks north of town turn blue  
from where their white water bends east—

that spot is where we both depart:  
one, dry grass blown ten thousand miles,

mind and soul of an aimless cloud,  
the other, too sad for sunset.

hands barely get lifted in wave:  
two horses neigh, turn heads, take paths.

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### **Du Fu's spring scene**

state a shambles, mountains and rivers endure.  
meanwhile, the city hides amidst spring's thick growth.

season's blossoms and flowers shed their spring tears,  
migrating birds' songs tell us they soon will leave.

beacon fires have burned for at least three full months.  
word from the folks would be worth a pound of gold:

worried, I've scratched bald spots into my white hair,  
this hatpin of no use just stuck in the hat.

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### **a chat between Li Bai and Du Fu**

#### ***Du Fu: midnight***

western lodge atop a stark thousand-foot cliff:  
at midnight past reed-blinded windows I stroll.

shooting stars on the river flash arcs of white.  
sands glow dim in the leftover moonlight late.

birds are hiding in the dark homes of their trees—  
likewise, in their waters, large fish find their depths.

friends and relations scattered over the world:  
in these days of raging war, no word gets through.

***Li Bai: tippling with the moon***

beneath blossoms, a lone jug of juice—  
just as alone, I fill but one cup:

I raise it to toast the rising moon  
and spy my shadow toasting with me!

the moon never understands my thirst,  
my shadow goes along with my gag:

here, moon and shadow, friends of my cup!  
isn't this the pulse of life in spring?

I sing—the moon, a pendulum, sways!  
I dance—my shadow writhes higher still!

tippling, we shared a grand good evening—  
tipped, we each crawled off on our own:

but agreed on the wisdom of wine,  
we plot to take our task to the stars!

***Du Fu's first dream of Li Bai***

graves left or graves lost, into silence death sinks:  
it's leaving the living that leaves us such pain.

south of the Yangtze, where swampy fevers plague,  
an exile banished, from whom no words have come.

—and now my old friend visits my dream  
(to memories, I add those of dreams):

he does not look quite himself, it's true,  
but he's walked a long or longer road.

his ghost blew in from maple groves blue and green  
then blew past, leaving me in gathering shade.

ensnared now in someone's sticky legal web,  
could you fly to escape on a pair of wings?

the moon sinks low and lights the rafters,  
I can't fail to see it light your face:

never sink into deep waters dark,  
never let horned dragons conquer you!

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### **detour to Han-shan**

unmarked, this highway to Han-shan's hangout,  
not one track of hoof or wheel  
mountains crowd each other, paths curl right and left,  
ridges lining ridges into the air,  
a thousand grasses steeped in dew,  
clumps of pine strummed by the wind—  
now you find you are on no path:  
ask your shadow “where are we now?”

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**(four more from Han-shan)**

5.

my mind is the autumn moon's  
clear pale light on a green pool.  
in truth, the two can't be compared:  
perhaps you could say?

9.

I've wanted to reach the eastern cliff  
at least for years and years and years.  
yesterday, I grabbed hold of a vine:  
halfway up wind and rain met me,  
the trail narrowed, my clothes all got snagged,  
the moss tried to eat the shoes off my feet:  
glad I found this red cinnamon tree,  
I'll park my head on a cloud and nap.

14.

I once was a student of book and sword  
and met two enlightened lords:  
protected the east and earned no reward,  
attacked the west and gained no honor.  
  
I read books and studied war,  
studied war and read books:  
today, I am old,  
  
little else to say.

99.

awww, poor poor scholar—  
“hunger” and “cold” are not mere words!  
not otherwise employed, writing verse,  
line by tenuous line the substance of pulse.  
—but no one collects unemployed verse:  
self-lacerations must yield blood, not ink.  
may as well print them on dog biscuits,  
which discerning mutts won't even lick.

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