Translation of Yuan Qiongqiong's Fever, with introduction/

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TRANSLATION OF YUAN QIONGQIONG'S "FEVER"
WITH INTRODUCTION

A Thesis Presented
by
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Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 1996

Chinese
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to the following people:

to Professor Donald Gjertson for supervising this project, coordinating my committee, and for his cheerful encouragement in guiding me through my thesis;

to Professor Christopher Lupke for sharing his expertise on modern and contemporary literature, for his enlightening feedback, and for taking the time to meet with me regularly inside his busy schedule;

to Professor Lucian Miller for participating on my committee, and for contributing his time and knowledge.

Finally, I would like to especially thank my mother, Eve Marcus, and my husband, Shi Liang for taking so much time to read carefully through my work and give me valuable comments and feedback, and to my father, Alan Marcus for his advice and encouragement.
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CHAPTER 1
COMPARISON OF "FEVER" AND "A SPACE OF ONE'S OWN"

Introduction

Yuan Qiongqiong was born in Taiwan in 1950. She graduated from Provincial Taiwan Commercial and Vocational School and began writing in 1972. She has written several collections of short stories: Chunshuituan (Spring Water Stories, 1979), Zijide tiankong (A Space of One's Own, 1981), Liangge rende shi, (Between Two, 1983), Cangsang (The Mulberry Sea, 1985), a book of essays: Hongchen xinshi, (Earthly Cares, 1981), and a novel: Jinshenyuan (Affinities of this Life, 1988). She also writes poetry under the name of Zhu Lin, and, since 1987, has been a television screen writer. Her fiction focuses on interpersonal relationships in contemporary, urban Taiwan.

The two short stories which I shall discuss in this half of my thesis are "A Space of One's Own"¹ (A Space of One's Own, 1981) and "Fever" (Mulberry Sea, 1985). Having a common core of a number of universal themes, the two stories contrast with one another in many ways. These common and contrasting elements highlight Yuan's development and abilities as a short story writer. The themes common to

¹Although the English translation by Jane Parish Young, from which I take my quotations for this thesis, uses the word "Place" in the title, I use the word "Space", believing it is more accurate.
both stories include: marriage and "the good wife", traditional social and economic values in contemporary society, verbal and physical interpersonal communication or the lack of it, and male and female attitudes toward loyalty, pride and affection. The contrasting elements of the two stories include: setting, point of view, tone, setting, characterization, narrative style and conclusion or resolution. I will explore some of these elements within the critique of each story and others as separate topics.

The earlier story, "A Space of One Own" ["A Space"], is an impressionistic narrative, that rambles through time, settings and interpersonal conflicts. It adopts a subdued tone and a limited, objective point of view seen and felt through the eyes and reactions of the main character Jingmin as well as the reactions of the characters with whom she interacts. Jingmin responds passively but realistically to her struggles in coping with traditional societal values and attitudes, as well as with personal and social injustices. This is related to the fact that she is Yuan's tool to explore "everywoman's" challenges in the male dominated of urban Taiwan. Jingmin is typical of many characters in Yuan's earlier works who allow themselves to be victimized in social and familial circumstances. "Fever", on the other hand, is a gripping and tightly focused flash-back narrative which photo-realistically exposes the actions and internal reality of one rebellious character. Its narrow time frame,
limited point of view and confined setting work successfully to zoom in on and expose the unusual thoughts and behaviors of the main character, Antao. Antao endeavors to be "the good wife", are neither passive nor based on realistic standards. Her endeavors can be seen as reactionary and obsessive, like political or religious zealotry, fanatically idealistic, and destructive. Antao's story is an example of Yuan's more recent interest in depicting individuals who exhibit unique forms of psychotic behavior. I shall begin by examining the differences which make these two pieces representative of the marked contrast in Yuan's earlier and later writings. Secondly, I have given each story its own section, in which I investigate of the main themes and ideas which I feel makes each a admirable artistic achievement in its own right.

**Point of View**

"A Space" is meant to be a social expose, which takes a feminist perspective in critiquing contemporary Taiwanese society. Spanning four years of Jingmin's life, the story presents pressures and inequalities that she faces as a woman in her culture. After investing seven years of being a homemaker and wife, she is banished from her house because she has not borne a son. At thirty she must enter the work force after being a housewife for all the years of their
marriage and having no chance to acquire career skills. Despite the fact that she manages to achieve economic success even with the odds against her, in the end she still feels inadequate, not having produced a son.

In "Fever" we are presented with a unique domestic relationship, and with the heroine's handling of her situation. Unlike "A Space", which explores broad social issues, "Fever" focuses on a human psychological reality which transcends particular historical time and space. While this piece also suggests a feminist reading—Antao's lack of employment, or apparent lack of any purpose in life beyond her lonely domestic sphere could undoubtedly have contributed to her psychological imbalance—the message remains peripheral to the story, since the reader is never given information on how Antao's hysteria came about. Society fades into the background. What we see is that the heroine is a possessed woman who is determined to keep her husband all to herself, at all costs and by any means. She wins her victory by way of killing him, so in the end he could belong to no one but her. The case is unique in that not only is it not bound to a particular social context, but it also lies outside of our common experience.
Characterization

It is indeed impressive that the author is able to successfully create two such divergent characters as Jingmin and Antao: the supreme conformist and the ultimate rebel. When Jingmin faces the end of her marriage and realizes how dependent she has become on her husband, she placidly accepts her new situation instead of questioning the unfairness of the social order. She settles without protest for what is available to her—a job which requires no special skills and another two-timing partner. Antao in contrast, is a warrior, unwilling to compromise in even the smallest way. She knows what she wants—her husband's unfaltering and eternal devotion—and fights relentlessly until she gets it. Ironically, Antao finally finds her peace of mind at the end of "Fever" after sending Qingzhao to his death. Jingmin's, on the other hand, is not satisfied with her lot at the end of "A Space". In her life, men are still in control, and she remains a victim.

Tone and Style

The objective style of "A Space" has the effect of keeping the reader at a distance. The narrative stops at the protagonist's surface feelings; we know Jingmin's direct
responses to her situation, but the author does not dwell on her emotions. For example, the protagonist's decision to request a divorce or lease out her store seem impulsive, since the reader learns nothing of the thought process behind these decisions. One could interpret style as implying that Jingmin herself is confused or impulsive, gut reactions often rule her important choices. Furthermore, the distance this objective style imposes allows the reader to take in the social context that surrounds the protagonist and to reflect on how this context acts to influence the course of her life.

"Fever" is a work which focuses on the heroine's intimate thought process in the absence any background or psychoanalysis. Although Antao recalls the details of the power struggle between herself and Qingzhao in bits and pieces, as one might do from an analyst's couch, that is just a style. The effect of this mosaic-type presentation is that we feel we are getting authentic and direct access to her psyche, but in fact we are not let in on the underlying personal history which makes her who she is. In "A Space", the portrayal Jingmin is unintense, the reader is just lightly touched by her emotions, whereas we are assaulted with the Antao's emotions and personality. We learn the wifely pride she takes in recalling the details of her husband's body, and her pleasure in knowing that she finally has her straying husband under lock and key.
Discussion of "A Space of One's Own"

The title, "A Space of One's Own", indicates a state of mind in which a woman believes in and values herself, a "space" to which she transcends and becomes unaffected by patriarchal society's judgments and limitations. This is what Jingmin, the main character in the story, strives for but never reaches. I intend to show that although she does gain some degree of autonomy, she ultimately lacks a secure sense of self-worth, because she feels that without a family, she does not measure up in society's eyes.

Due to the disparity of power between the genders, in personal relationships and in the work world, Jingmin does not actually become the "independent confident woman" she herself lays claim to by the end of "A Space". One major way in which sexual inequity plays itself out in this work is that Liangsan is in the position to take advantage of his wife, and selfishly does. Because Jingmin had not given birth in seven years of marriage, he feels no shame or guilt in going behind her back and seeking a mistress to have a son. He shows his lack of esteem and consideration for Jingmin by revealing to her the personal and sensitive matter of his mistress and her pregnancy in a crowded restaurant, in front of his three brothers, and further reveals his male selfishness by having the audacity to go on
and suggest she learns to cook the dish he orders from the menu.

Because of her gender, Jingmin is at a disadvantage outside of marriage of well. After her divorce, she must confront the challenge of supporting herself, a challenge she is unprepared for. After years of marriage she has become not just financially but also and psychologically dependent on her husband. Not only has she never earned money herself, she does not even remember to take money with her when she goes to the restaurant, so unaccustomed is she to leaving the house without Liangsan. In addition to the financial pressure she faces, she also lives with the social stigma attached to being a middle-aged divorcee. When Jingmin's friends learn that she asked for a divorce, they criticize her for making a rash and foolish decision. Even her women peers would expect Jingmin to tolerate her husband's infidelity to hold on to her marital status and economic support. It is better, they seem to believe, to be married to a unfaithful husband than not married at all.

On the surface it appears that out on her own Jingmin becomes the master of her destiny. She finds financial security and sexual fulfillment, defying the stereotype of a middle-aged divorcee. While she has made some gains, she remains, by and large, a victim of an oppressive patriarchal environment. Her "career" itself is a compromise, as well as a fluke: she becomes an insurance broker because "she
does not know how to do anything else", not because this is what she has always wanted to be. As a woman she did not have the same opportunities as men to learn a chosen profession. Her success in climbing the corporate ladder is not due to her ambition or talent, but actually her naivety. Her clients find it hard not to sympathize with her passive manner, and this is why they buy her policies.

Any autonomy gained as a result of being on her own becomes shaky in her encounters and relations with men. When she finds herself attracted to her former brother-in-law, she becomes so unnerved at her own weakness for a man who is socially taboo for her, that she compulsively leases out her store and changes careers to avoid another such temptation. Jingmin feels, "frightened", "transparent", and like "fragile glass" when she finds her feelings for her client, Qu Shaojie, have turned romantic. This weakness she demonstrates in dealing with men is because by becoming intimately involved with a man, Jingmin inevitably finds herself in a disadvantaged, vulnerable position.

This is the case in her relation with her new lover. She longs to have a child with him, but there is no guarantee that this father of two children will be willing to help her fulfill her desire for a son. Furthermore, even if she were to become pregnant, she would be, for the second time, a contender in a "love triangle", this time as "the other woman". By having an affair with a married man,
Jingmin does to Qu Shaojie's wife what Liangsan's new wife had done to her: woman become victims and losers in the gender war.

So while life goes on for Jingmin after her divorce, she is unable to find a place for herself in society as a single, childless woman. An example which illustrates well this insecurity she feels is the final restaurant scene in which she meets Liangsan's new family. Four years ago, Liangsan treated her shabbily because she did not bear him and son to carry on his name, and now his glamorous mistress has become a plain woman with only two daughters. By telling Liangsan she is married and that Liu Fen's son is really hers she appears to demonstrate her savvy by "rubbing it in", and taking revenge on her ex-husband. Her primary motive, however, for telling this lie is to "save face". Here she shows that she is not the "confident, independent" woman she claims to be. Her embarrassment at being husbandless overshadows any other achievements. In the final analysis, she remains a prisoner of the patriarchal ideology that requires a woman to marry a man and bear him a son.

Discussion of "Fever"

"Fever" is a story about the desire to possess and a relationship characterized by a power struggle. The latter
arises from the former. What makes this domestic power struggle different from many other abusive relationships is that it is the woman who initiates attacks and ultimately conquers the man. The story has further social significance in that the author lets Antao get away with her murder, whereas in many cases women are severely punished for killing their partners even after long histories of abuse.

The power struggle between Qingzhao and Antao can be divided into three phases. During the first phase, Antao is able to control Qingzhao with her timetables, back up phone calls and, if he still fails to adhere to her schedule, by staging bitter tantrums. In the second phase, the power shifts to Qingzhao as he begins to aggressively defend himself by battering his wife into submissiveness and silence. During this phase Antao realizes her protests have become counterproductive, and temporarily concedes defeat in their domestic war. Even when Qingzhao flaunts evidence of his unfaithfulness she must repress her burning jealousy. If she dares to protest she risks suffering his blows.

While conditions remain normal, Qingzhao maintains the upper hand through physical intimidation. But in the third and final phase he falls ill, and thus falls subject to his wife's domination. He becomes too weak to even rise from his bed, and by no means has the strength to retaliate against Antao. Having been stripped of all other means of power in her relationship with her husband, Antao ultimately
seizes the opportunity she has been waiting for to exercise her control over Qingzhao. She plays the role of "dutiful wife and loving mother", making herself the sole caretaker of her ailing husband and preventing him from seeing a doctor. By staging her battles patiently and strategically, she has managed to undermine the physical advantage he held as a man, and wins the final conflict. This triumph is achieved, paradoxically, in the death and loss of the man she wants to keep.

For Antao, love equals possession of the other person. It is an intimate state of oneness in which anyone else can only be an intruder. Antao's obsessive need to possess Qingzhao drives her to take extreme measures to keep her husband all to herself. She demands that Qingzhao spend literally each non-working minute with her. Every day she times his arrival to the office in the morning, and home in the afternoon. At lunch time she also runs downtown to eat with him, allowing him no time to talk to his buddies or colleagues. Another manifestation Antao's possessive love is her belief that a truly devoted wife knows her husband's mind and body. While riding in the hearse Antao recalls the image of Qingzhao's salt-streaked body after he had been sweating, and thinks proudly, "Certainly there were many wives who had never seen the salt streaks on their husband's body. She knew she was special." Antao has made it a

2This quotation is from my English translation, Chapter two of this
habit to guess what Qingzhao will say or do next, and feels triumphant on predicting him correctly. That she can predict her husband's thoughts and actions is evidence to her of their intimacy. The most dramatic testimony to her possessive love is that when Qingzhao's is too ill to even eat or stand without her help, and is locked in the house safely away from colleagues or friends, she loves him most. In this state he depends on her, and on her alone. Rather than ever sharing him again with others, she would let him die so that he will be exclusively hers forever.

The high rise apartment where the couple lives symbolizes Antao's control over and possession of Qingzhao. While he is confined to the walls of their apartment, he belongs to her. But as soon as he steps outside she must share him with the rest of the world, something she abhors. While Qingzhao must be away at work, Antao waits in agony for his return. During the second phase of their relationship, when Qingzhao defies her control over his freedom, he does it by intentionally delaying his return home. If she scolds him or complains about his absence, he turns around and walks out, rejecting her authority over him by the closing of the door behind him. Throughout Qingzhao's illness Antao always locks the door from the outside when she has to go out to buy food or medicine even though he is much too weak to leave on his own. Hearing the
bolt snap "ka da" into the locked position, lets Antao feels her control over her husband.

Heat is a constant image through this story symbolizing the excessive ardor and passion of the protagonist. It is her burning desire for possession that eventually leads to the destruction of the couple's relationship and the end of Qingzhao's life. The sultry weather, Qingzhao's fever, Antao's "burning" jealousy, are all images that contribute to this theme. The author describes at length the feeling of the warm wind on Antao's skin as she stands near the open window, the stifling hot air inside the hearse, the itchy heat rash on her neck. Images of coolness and ice contrast with the intense heat, further emphasizing the heat's oppressiveness. Antao understands that Qingzhao is dying when the fever subsides and his body cools down. His body is placed in a freezer in the funeral house, and finally in a coffin which shields his corpse from the hot Taipei air, while his funeral-goers suffer the oppressive city heat.

Conclusion

In this introduction I have discussed two of Yuan Qiongqiong's stories, in comparison and as individual works. By comparing the two pieces, published five years apart, my intention was not only to use the differences as a strategy to further bring out the characteristics of each story, but
also to demonstrate a change in the author's writing. I believe that these two stories testify to both the author's artistic talent as well as to her versatility.
The traffic light up ahead changed to red. The hearse slowed, then came to a halt at the intersection. 

It was hot. Looking out of the window, cars of all sizes sat idle at the intersection. The sun's glare reflected off their paint, dazzling the eyes until specs of light appeared. The asphalt seemed to have been transformed into a sheet of white steel, radiating a sense of faint smoke, as if it were a flame.

Antao rode in the hearse, cloaked in her mourning apparel; the hempen shawl draped across her shoulders. The coarse, stiff hood scratched and tickled her face with its edges. Her neck perspired heavily, soaking the heat rash in more salt, causing a numb, hot kind of pain. Salty beads of sweat grew out of the skin, drop by drop, like live creatures, accumulating to form larger beads which slid slowly down the neck, leaving whitish streaks on the skin.

Antao looked the picture of a somber widow as she sat frozen, her eyes focused on the floor of the car. It's odd, she found herself thinking, how when white salt sticks to underarm hairs, it takes on a yellowish color. That's probably due to the reflection off the skin. When Qingzhao ran a high fever sweat would pour out of his body. Then his own body heat would cause the sweat to evaporate, and
afterwards tiny frost-like granules would appear on his skin, especially in the creases. At first glance, this film appeared to be a thin sheet of matted hairs, but actually it was threads of salt. She hadn't been aware of this phenomenon before, because before she had never been so intimate with Qingzhao. Surely, there were many wives who had never seen the salt streaks on their husbands' bodies. Antao knew she was special. She lowered her head and bit her lip, forcing back a secret smile.

Qingzhao's mother and sister were sitting up front, their faces expressionless. Mother-in-law stared dully at the coffin in the center of the vehicle, covering her nose and mouth with a handkerchief. At first this gesture appeared to be an effort to hold in deep sadness. But during the moment they were waiting at the light, it looked as if that dull, unresponsive face was actually shielding its nose from the foul odor inside the car. Sister-in-law turned her face to the side and moved toward the open window, inviting the wind to touch her, but the air was stagnant. There was a murky darkness inside the car, like the waters at the bottom of the sea, probably because of the coffin's blackness. But despite the shady blackness, it was by no means cool.

None of them waved a fan or wiped the sweat from their faces, as if too much movement would show disrespect toward the dead. The living people sat motionless. Any
movements were concealed and gradual. Antao lifted her head, being careful not to make a sound, then let her eyes fall upon the coffin.

If anyone among them was cool, it was the deceased.

Qingzhao had been dead for two months now. For a while a the funeral parlor could not come up with a date, so they had temporarily put his body in freezer. When they first took the corpse out, it was covered with frosty ice granules. It must have been completely covered with a salt-like film. Antao hadn't actually been there to see this spectacle, but based on her experience with refrigerators she came up with this picture in her mind. When later they did get to see Qingzhao, the make-up artist had already fixed him up. He looked clean, but there was this peculiar icy, unclean odor. Antao suspected was likely formaldehyde or some other kind of preservative.

Now, inside the hearse, this obscure odor drifted about, though masked somewhat by the stench of sweat and the other smells from the bodies of the living. This hearse had been used by different people, living and dead. The weak smell of gasoline drifted from one corner, and a stale, sickening smell permeated the air. Compared to these odors, Qingzhao's corpse smelled mild. At least it was an aseptic smell, cold and pure.

The light turned green and the long line of waiting cars began to move again. The hearse proceeded forward, and
the coffin began shifting again with the movement of the vehicle. Those knocking noise had been there since the beginning of the ride. Nobody mentioned anything, so Antao dared not ask the others if they had noticed the noise or not—that low, sharp "ka", beat in time. The coffin sounded each time the lid hit the frame. It must have been, Antao suspected, that when they pushed the coffin into the hearse, one corner of the lid didn't line up properly, so that it hit against the bottom frame with each motion of the car. The lid shifted off center, then fell into place again.

Her sister-in-law took in the air outside the window. She squinted her eyes, looking as is she were going to doze off. Then all of a sudden, with some effort she drew deep breaths through her nose, opening her eyes wider.

It was very hot.

It had been hot for quite some time. They installed an air conditioner into their apartment, for Qingzhao. He couldn't stand the heat. When Antao was alone in the house she just opened the window. They lived on the twelfth floor of a high rise building. Facing them were more rows of high rises, many even taller that theirs. If you looked out the window, you could see countless small apartment units suspended in the air. Little windows in the distance framed the vague, indistinct outlines of people. Up on the twelfth floor the air hummed as it circulated. As the wind whipped against the window pane, it gave off a sound like wings
flapping. It was hot wind. Sometimes Antao would stand at the window and feel the warm wind blow over her. Like a living thing, it wrapped itself around her, rolling around her muscles, her skin, her face. Then it peeled itself off and whipped away. After the wind had swept over her, she felt as if she had been stripped, exposed. This brought a cool sensation to her skin.

On that day, at around three o'clock in the afternoon it began to rain. Antao had been sleeping, and when she woke up the entire room was dark, as if it were already dusk. She quickly rose from the bed and went to close the window. Rain drops shot into the bedroom. Even the raindrops, she mused, were hot. Antao shut the window, pulled down the shade, and turned on the light. It seemed like midnight in the house. Outside, thunder struck, exploding with deafening blasts, like the furious anger of someone with a enormous voice. Antao sat in the bedroom. She hesitated for a long while before dialing Qingzhao's office.

Qingzhao didn't like her to call the office, so she called only very occasionally. The truth was, she wasn't afraid of thunder, the storm was just an excuse. She held the receiver in her palm, the finger tips of her left hand tracing the number holes. The sound of thunder exploded above her head, splitting the sky open. She hoped that the
moment Qingzhao picked up phone, a timely crash of lightening would strike.

A woman answered the phone by announcing the name of the company. "I'd like to speak to Assistant Manager Qingzhao Lei," said Antao.

"Would you mind calling back in a little while? Manager Lei is in a meeting right now."

"Could I please leave a message?" Antao said.

As soon as these words escaped her mouth, she wished she hadn't said them. She realized immediately she had done something very stupid. But it was too late; the woman on the other end had already responded. "Alright, what's the message, please."

She left a message for Qingzhao to call home.

She knew that Qingzhao wouldn't return the call. Qingzhao had never called her on his own accord, and leaving a message for him to call brought no response from him. This had become custom for a long long time now. Antao pictured the scene in which Qingzhao sees the message that she called. In an absent-minded, perfunctory manner he crumbles the piece of paper up into a ball and tosses it into the wastebasket. Knowing that Qingzhao would discard her message wasn't what excited her. What excited her was knowing that she had predicted the scene very accurately. She knew this is exactly what would happen. Then the
sensation she felt was the kind of excitement you that comes over you when you know the right answer to a hard question.

Just as she had predicted, Qingzhao didn't return her call.

It continued to pour outside. It rained until dark, then gradually the storm subsided. The drops falling on the tall building were barely audible anymore. They clung to the walls and to the windows, like countless transparent fish scales, then were pulled away by an invisible hand. As they dripped off, the droplets gave off a crisp, "ba-da" sound.

Qingzhao didn't come home until after ten o'clock. Antao was sitting on the sofa watching the late show. Qingzhao pushed the door open, then took his shoes off in the doorway. Antao continued to look towards the TV, but she still managed to watch at him through the corner of her eye. To walk through the living room he had to pass in front of the television. Qingzhao walked through the room, his manner cool and composed, not a trace of guilt in his demeanor. As he passed directly in front of the TV, blocking her view of the screen, her line of sight fell directly upon him. She crossed her arms in front of her chest, "I called you this afternoon."

She said this because she felt that there had to be some sort of conversation between a couple. She wasn't really expecting Qingzhao to give her an explanation.
She knew what Qingzhao's next reaction would be.  
She could speak for him.  
Qingzhao stopped walking for a second. He ambivalently cast a glance her way, then looked beyond her, putting on an expression as if pondering, "Oh yeah, I know. I remember I was going to call; then I forgot."
Antao waited for the next line.
An innocent, child like expression came over his delicate featured face. He opened his eyes wide, "What did you call me about?"
"It was nothing."
Qingzhao paused a moment, then said politely, "So in that case, does it matter that I didn't call back?"
"It doesn't matter," Antao said triumphantly.
Qingzhao proceeded into the bedroom. Antao had a surreptitious way about her: whenever she was on the verge of losing her temper, like a silkworm she would wrap herself up in an airtight cocoon. She put on a composed, detached exterior, but inside her breast lurked a sharp fury. Eventually, the form became the content, and she was left with a composed and detached emptiness.
Antao focused her attention once again on the television. When it got late she went into the bedroom to go to sleep. That's when she discovered Qingzhao had a fever.
The two of them still shared a bed, and when she touched Qingzhao inadvertently, she found his skin was burning hot. Antao turned on the light to look at him. She saw that Qingzhao was sleeping soundly, and his face was flushed red. She checked his forehead; it felt very hot. She shook him awake, "You're running a fever."

Qingzhao opened his eyes and looked at her. His moist eyes looked like the eyes of a small animal, translucent and defenseless. Antao pressed her palm lightly against his forehead, "You're sick."

Qingzhao looked at her, still only half awake. He murmured annoyedly, "headache," and shut his eyes again, "must be a cold."

"I'll take your temperature."

"Don't bother," Qingzhao said, "it's nothing."

But Antao still got out the thermometer and put it under Qingzhao's tongue. Qingzhao opened his eyes wider but didn't put up any real resistance; he only wore a weary expression. Antao bent over him. Under her shadow his eyes appeared yellowish and turbid.

Thirty-nine degrees centigrade.

Qingzhao's breath on the thermometer smelled slightly unclean. As he gazed at the needle indicator two or three centimeters from his nose the smell of his unhealthy breath twisted deviously toward him.

That was the first day.
Thinking back now, as far back as she could remember, she and Qingzhao had never before been as close as they were during those fourteen days. All the way up until his death, it had been only the two of them together, only the two of them, nobody else. For fourteen days Qingzhao was completely hers, with no one to come between them.

She had always hated anyone close to him, male or female.

At the beginning of their relationship, Qingzhao accepted Antao's possessiveness as a expression of intense love. The Qingzhao of that time was willing be controlled by Antao. Antao's style was like this: as long you went along with her, she could sweet beyond any expectation; but if you opposed her, she could also become unreasonable beyond imagination.

Their married life gradually filled with thorns.

Everyday Antao planned Qingzhao's timetable—what time he should leave home, how much time he needed to spend on the road, what time he should arrive at the office. More often than not, within five minutes after Qingzhao sat down in front of his desk, his phone would ring and it would be Antao. At noontime Antao would rush out to meet Qingzhao for lunch, then afterwards walk him back to his office. Back at home, she waited in anguish all afternoon, then starting at five thirty, the time Qingzhao was scheduled to leave work, she counted down the minutes he would have to
spend on the road, waiting for the sound of his key entering the door lock. Qingzhao had only to be five minutes late, and every place he could have gone, any friend, any colleague, any acquaintance would all get a call from Antao inquiring after Qingzhao. They had been married only half a year and anyone who had any association with Qingzhao knew that he was bound by a short rope, his activity a confined within definite and limited boundaries. Antao controlled his time tightly, and he could not venture any further than she allowed.

Occasionally, due to circumstances beyond his control, Qingzhao's was delayed past the hour Antao had figured--time had run out but he hadn't got to his office yet, or he hadn't arrived home by the scheduled hour. This never failed to enrage Antao. Starting from the minute that he became tardy, her anger would begin to accumulate. By the time Qingzhao did arrive, he was faced with a time bomb. Antao listened to no excuses; she accepted no apologies. Her temper would flair and she would throw things left and right, curse maliciously, and afterwards, sob. She sobbed until all the energy was drained from her body and she passed out. Finally in the end, the two of them would make up, in bed. Qingzhao gave his oath, he swore to the heavens that nothing would ever delay him again. Antao would snuggle into his arms, tears in her eyes, listening to his
words, a smile on her lips. It was sweet, yet it was a sweetness with thorns.

But later on things began to change. Antao noticed that Qingzhao's attitude had gradually become more defiant. He began to ignore her rules and her schedules. He even dawdled intentionally, often not coming home until late at night. Antao would always be up waiting for him, every light in the house on. When Qingzhao did come home, he offered no explanation and showed no remorse. If she complained or protested he hit her in the face. Sometimes her mouth became so badly swollen she couldn't talk for days. In the end, they would always make up, in bed. Qingzhao was callous and dominating; Antao, humiliated but with a certain recalcitrance. During these times she felt an unspeakable dread, but at the same time a fresh kind of exhilaration. When Qingzhao's kissed her lips, lips freshly swollen from his battering, she could taste traces of her salty blood on his mouth. It was as if a thick wall existed between them. An odd sort of distance, very far, yet very near, separated the two of them.

Her power gradually diminished until Antao found that Qingzhao paid no absolutely no heed to anything she said or did. It was useless for her to show her fury, useless to nag or plead with him. Qingzhao had grown callous. He would sit on the sofa, his eyes fixed rigidly upon some point in space. If Antao scolded or accused him, he would
stand up and abruptly walk out without waiting for her to finish. Antao adjusted her behavior. She managed to adopted the cool and detached attitude of an observer. Not once had the two talked openly about their feelings, instead they constantly dropped signals and beat around the bush, never saying what they really wanted to say, always talking round and about on irrelevant topics.

Qingzhao seemed to find new amusement in this kind of relationship. He was quite good at stirring her jealousy.

Rashly, he brought back all sorts of clues- an earning, a perfumed handkerchief, a hairpin with a strand of hair coiled around it, a trace of lipstick on his collar. He never came out and told her anything, so Antao could only suspect and play the fool in the face of this array of evidence. She couldn't question Qingzhao; he would always say, "You're imagining things." Or sometimes he would say, "I can't remember how it happened, must have been a colleague."

She knew for certain he was lying to her, but when he told these lies, he didn't waver for an instant; he kept cool as marble. His manner was nonchalant, but he saw everything coming and was ready to confront it. With feigned apathy, he watched, never letting down his guard, for his wife's next move. This left Antao constantly unsettled. If she let her anger or any obvious signs of jealousy show through, she had fallen into the trap. During
these contests, she was absolutely unwilling to come out on the losing side.

She discovered a small gift-wrapped box in Qingzhao's briefcase. From the wrapping paper she could tell it bought at a well-known imported goods shop. It wasn't clear to her if Qingzhao was going to give the package to a woman, or if a woman had given it to Qingzhao. Antao saw Qingzhao take out the box very deliberately and place it on the table. As he put it down he ignored Antao, as if it were the most insignificant thing, nothing out of the ordinary. Antao shot a curious glance at the package, as if tasting with her tongue. Her eyes grazed it for a moment, then she looked away. She didn't say anything, nor did her facial expression alter in any way. In this cryptic struggle between the couple, she was unwilling to admit defeat. Qingzhao left the box on the table.

For three or four days that thing—just large enough to rest in the palm of one's hand, covered in light green wrapping paper marked with the store name, a pink ribbon tied around its middle—never moved from its position. Both of them saw it every day. Neither Antao nor Qingzhao touched it. That light green and pink spot stubbornly clung to the table like a mysterious stain, tainting Antao's view of the room. Antao bore it with bittersweet pleasure. By appearing unaffected in the midst of her own anguish, she came out victorious. Until Qingzhao finally removed it,
neither husband nor wife showed any reaction to this object, as if it didn't exist. Antao never knew what was inside the package. She had triumphed over her emotions so well that she even managed suppress her curiosity.

The second day Qingzhao still had a fever. Antao kept him at home. She put an ice pack on his forehead, covered him with a blanket to make him sweat, then locked the door behind her and went out to buy medicine. She locked the door. She put the key into the keyhole and turned it twice. She heard the "ka da" sound of the lock mechanism snapping into place. A strange feeling came over Antao. She had locked Qingzhao inside the house.

Right before she left she had taken his temperature: forty degrees. He was in a state of near delirium. He slept constantly. His body was uniformly hot all over. He looked like he had been roasted in an oven. His skin was dry and red, and it felt clean to the touch. His smooth, feverish skin had a delicate quality to it, which was almost beautiful. Qingzhao's clean, handsome face, eyes closed, look on a quality of lifelessness. It looked serene, and flawless, like the image in a painting. She realized that in his condition it was absolutely impossible for him to get out of bed and leave the house, but still, locking him inside made Antao feel she was controlling him. She went to a drug store three blocks away to buy cold tablets and fever
medicine. As she walked along the road, Antao felt extremely happy.

Antao called in sick for Qingzhao, "Yes, he's got a fever, I'm afraid he won't be able to go into work."

"Has he seen a doctor?"

"Yeah, he has", Antao said. She didn't hesitate to lie for a second. By that time she had already given Qingzhao some fever medicine, and his temperature had gone down. Qingzhao had gotten up to drink a glass of water. He had been lying under a heavy blanket and his body was sticky with sweat. She took a dry towel and wiped down his entire body. Qingzhao lay there, weak and obedient, like a child.

Antao ministered his medicine to him, once every four hours. She made rice gruel and oatmeal and had him eat it sitting up in bed. When he didn't feel like eating, she coaxed him in a low, gentle tone. Antao seemed to be playing some kind of game. She devoted herself to playing the role of dutiful wife and loving mother. She endured the impatient and irritable expression in the patient's eyes.

Qingzhao's fever went down, then rose again. Antao continued to give him fever tablets. She covered him with two thick blankets. His fever continued fluctuating for four days. He would become soaked from head to foot in perspiration, then his own body heat would caused the sweat to evaporate. Salt, a product of his suffering, left traces
on his body. Granules stuck to his body hairs, creating a vast white sheet, like frost, or snow.

At the beginning it probably was just a cold. Qingzhao himself wasn't at all concerned. He figured with time he'd get over it. Two or three days later, he began to cough. He'd wake up coughing in the middle of the night. He complained that his chest hurt, then his stomach hurt, too. He continued to run a high temperature. The fever caused his lips to gradually whither and peel, and his to eyes sink into his head.

By the fourth day he was no longer able to get out of bed to use the bathroom. Even if he managed to lift himself from the bed he would then collapse onto the floor. Antao was in the kitchen cooking something when she heard a crash coming from the bedroom. She went to the bedroom and saw Qingzhao's twisted body spread out on the floor. At first she thought he had fainted. He hadn't. Qingzhao opened his eyes as wide as he could, he had exhausted all his energy, and his heavy eyelids were barely able to reveal the pupils of his sunken eyes, giving him an unsteady, drowsy appearance. "You have to take me to see a doctor." Qingzhao said. "Fine, no problem," Antao responded. "I'm afraid it's not just a cold anymore," Qingzhao said, forcing an agreeable smile. From behind the cracked, curled up lips, a hot, burnt odor drifted forth. All the moisture had evaporated from his mouth, leaving behind a parched,
hopeless smell. "You have got to take me to the hospital." Qingzhao said.

"Alright, I will. Wait till tomorrow."

She helped him back onto the bed. He was very hot. Antao took out the cold towel that she had chilled in the freezer and wiped his body. The towel was frozen solid. The patient twitched when the below zero degree cloth came into contact with his skin. Qingzhao opened his eyes halfway; hot breath spewed forth from his dry, cracked lips.

She gave him lots of water to drink and hand-pressed apple, plum and grape juice for him. Antao took care of him in her own way.

She was not going to take him to the hospital. She had made this decision with a cool head. She never imagined at any time that Qingzhao could die. She didn't believe this could possibly happen. Qingzhao was so young. And anyhow, all he had was a cold.

She took care of him. Except for occasional trips to the store to buy the necessities, she never left the house. She fed him patiently, one mouthful at a time. She wiped down his body with a moist towel. Qingzhao was obviously becoming thinner, his stomach had caved in like a deflated balloon. His chest was sunken in too, and Antao could see clearly the outline of his ribs. Sometimes, when she toweled his body, he showed no reaction. He just lay there, as if paralyzed, not moving a muscle. Antao saw to it that
he was very clean. She neatly trimmed his finger and toenails, and rubbed the hard skin on the bottom of his feet with pumice stone until it was soft and smooth. The patient was as listless as an inorganic body, completely at her mercy.

Throughout his sickness he drifted in and out of consciousness. When he was cognizant he would say, "I want to go to the doctor." Antao would gently reassure him, "We'll go, we'll go. Just wait until morning."

Qingzhao was so docile and obedient. She didn't want him to die. It's just that she couldn't face sending him out of the house, putting him into the hands of others. She bought large quantities of over the counter medicine. She trusted that medicine, and she trusted herself. Antao tirelessly cared for Qingzhao. For days on end she didn't comb her hair or bathe. She didn't even take the time to check her appearance in the mirror. Qingzhao lay on their double bed. When she felt absolutely exhausted Antao slept next to him. She held his hand in hers. The sick man's hand was hot and limp, like soft plastic left for hours under the sun.

He coughed, too. Even after taking two cough suppressant tablets his coughing persisted. He coughed up shiny transparent phlegm in roundish, tear like droplets. At night Antao was often awakened from sleep by the sound of
his laborious breathing. His loud groans sounded like an animal's roar.

Antao became thinner herself. She lost weight willingly; she was suffering together with Qingzhao. It was as if they were united. She and Qingzhao were bound together tightly. Countless times she daydreamed happily how after Qingzhao recovery she would tell him what she felt like during this time. She knew that for the rest of her life, she would always remember these days as the time she felt most intimate with husband. Only during this time did they truly belong to each other; with noone to interfere. She loved him very, very much.

She was willing to endure it all—the fatigue, lack of sleep, discomfort, anything to have Qingzhao remain at her side. But Qingzhao still managed to escaped from her; he escaped through death.

Qingzhao died peacefully. Antao didn't even know when it was that he actually died. Gradually, during the course of those ten odd days, his movements became fewer and fewer. When she lay next to him, she relied on his body's heat to know if her were still alive. She also listened for an occasional dry cough and the heavy sound of his breathing.

The lights in the house were always on and the curtains always drawn. During those days, it was impossible to tell day from night. Antao had fallen asleep at Qingzhao's side. All of a sudden she woke. The reason for her waking was
that she heard, so clearly, the tick-tock of the clock. The room was unusually quiet, except for the tick-tock sound of the rotating second hand which was particularly loud and crisp. In the stillness, the sound was remarkably loud, as if amplified. At first she didn't even recognize the sound, then she all of a sudden realized what it was. She didn't remember ever before having listened to the sound of time passing.

Everything was so quiet.

Qingzhao was also very quiet. The life had left his face. It had turned a corpse-like grey. His body returned to normal temperature, then the temperature began to drop quickly. This was the first time since he had become ill that his temperature had gone down.

Antao looked into Qingzhao's face. His mouth was wide open, as if he were taking a large bite of something. The last few days he had had trouble breathing, and relied almost entirely on his mouth get air. His eyelids concealed the eyeballs completely, but a narrow slit unwillingly exposed a thin line of white.

She waited for Qingzhao's body too cool thoroughly before calling his family. "I thought it was only a cold," she sobbed. "I didn't imagine after only a few days..."

The only living relatives Qingzhao had were his mother and an older sister. The two of them saw Antao's haggard appearance and completely neglected to look into the cause
of death. They never knew how he died. On the death certificate it was written that he died of complications from a cold. He died of a cold. Qingzhao.

The loose cover on Qingzhao's coffin continued to give off soft, monotonous thuds. The sound was similar to two sections of a fractured bone hitting against one another. It was so faint that you almost had to feel that "ka" sound to be aware of it.

As she looked out the small window of the hearse, the sun's fierce glare blinded her eyes so that all she saw before her was a stretch of whiteness.

Thinking back now, to say that she didn't know Qingzhao would die was a little bit self-deceptive. On that day she had gone out to buy cough suppressant for Qingzhao. He had begun to cough up thick phlegm. The dark brown, rust-colored phlegm looked filthy. Antao came back and used her key to open the door. The lock had obviously released, but the door wouldn't push open. She tried again and again. Then she noticed a muted sound coming from the other side of the door, like some soft object sweeping along the floor. Antao gave a strong shove and the door opened. It was Qingzhao. He had been sitting up with his back leaning against the door, so when she swung open the door she pushed him back with it. Antao stepped inside and closed the door. Losing his support, Qingzhao fell straight down, like some object that had been leaned unstably against a wall. He lay
on the floor, his neck lodged crookedly between the corner of the wall and floor. "I...want...to go...see...a doctor."

Qingzhao spoke slowly, one word at a time. He was dressed neatly, in a suit. She could hardly imagine how much energy he must have spent to fix himself up like this. Antao's first emotion was fury. She marched into the center of the room, put the stuff she had bought down on the table, and said sharply, "I bought medicine!"

She sat on the sofa, watching Qingzhao, who lay paralyzed against the door. He moved his hand to the side of the door, then as if caressing it, he slowly brushed his hand against the corner of the door. After a long while, Antao walked over. "I must...go to...the hospital," the sick man said, his tone guilty and ashamed, as if he were making a presumptuous request, "otherwise... I... will... die."

Antao propped him up and half dragging, half pulling she got him onto the bed. Qingzhao still was still saying breathlessly, "I beg you, I beg you."

Antao didn't say anything. Qingzhao begged her two or three times, then he was silent, too.

After she got Qingzhao settled onto the bed, he just he lay there, stiffly. He gave out a long wail, then began to cry, loudly and unrestrainedly. Antao cried with him. Qingzhao didn't look at her; he turned his head away. Sobs mixed with acute dry coughs ripped forth from his throat.
Seeing him in this state, a vague sense of guilt swept over Antao, but immediately she managed to dismiss it. She cried with Qingzhao, "You won't die," she sobbed, "it's only a cold!" Tears streamed down her face, washing everything clean. She forgot that uneasy feeling that had come over her a moment ago.

Not until after Qingzhao died did Antao understand what she had gained. During the past two months she felt at ease. Her troubles, her uneasiness, suspicion, jealousy, they all went away. During these past two months she even gained some weight. Qingzhao's death put her mind at rest. Finally, she had him all to herself.

She had no regrets. There was absolutely no doubt that she loved Qingzhao up until the last moment. She still loved him, even now. She remembered those last days down to every detail. She recalled each expression, each gesture of the husband who belonged to her, and only her.

Feeling happy, Antao squinted her eyes against the bright sun. The hot wind brushed across her face, like a giant tongue licking her cheek. Salty perspiration soaked the heat rash on her neck, like lots of little needles pricking her skin.

Qingzhao's coffin shook, "ka, ka" with the bumpy movements of the car. Gradually, the sound became less and less clear, finally becoming so faint that it was no longer audible. The weak, feeble protest of the deceased was gone.
Her expression appeared drowsy as she squinted her eyes against sun's bright rays.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


