

**Dawn
Blossoms
Plucked
at Dusk**

Lu Hsun

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Preface

I often hanker after a little peace and respite from confusion, but it is really hard to come by. The present is so bizarre and my state of mind so confused. When a man reaches the stage when all that remains to him is memories, his life should probably count as futile enough, yet sometimes even memories may be lacking. In China there are rules for writing, and worldly affairs still move in a tortuous course. A few days ago when I left Sun Yat-sen University, I remembered how I left Amoy University four months ago; and the drone of planes overhead reminded me of the planes which, a year ago, had circled daily over Peking. At that time I wrote a short essay called "The Awakening."¹ Today, even this fails to "awaken" me.

It certainly grows hot early in Kwangchow; the rays of the setting sun shining through the west window force one to wear nothing but a shirt at most. The "water-bough" in a basin on my desk is something quite new to me, a lopped-off bough which, immersed in water, will put out lovely green leaves. Looking at these green leaves and

¹ Included in the collection *Wild Grass*.

editing some old manuscripts means that I am doing something, I suppose. Doing such trifling things, although really tantamount to death in life, is an excellent way of banishing the heat.

The day before yesterday I finished editing *Wild Grass*; now it is the turn of *Recollections of the Past*, serialized in the magazine *Wilderness*, and I have changed its name to *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*. Of course flowers plucked with dew on them are much fresher and sweeter, but I was unable to gather these at dawn. Even now I cannot readily transpose my confused thoughts and feelings into bizarre, confused writings. Perhaps some day when I look up at the fleeting clouds, they may flash before my eyes.

For a time I kept recalling the vegetables and fruits I ate as a child in my old home: caltrops, horse-beans, water bamboo shoots, musk-melons. So succulent, so delicious were they all, they beguiled me into longing for my old home. Later, tasting these things again after a protracted absence, I found them nothing special. It was only in retrospect that they retained their old flavour. They may keep on deceiving me my whole life long, making my thoughts turn constantly to the past.

These ten pieces are records transcribed from memory, perhaps deviating somewhat from the facts, but this is just how I remember things today. The writing itself is no doubt a strange hodgepodge, having been jotted down by fits and starts, over a period of nine months or more. The surroundings differed too: the first two pieces were written by the east wall of my house in Peking; the next three during my wanderings in hospitals and in a carpen-

ter's workshop;² the last five on the top floor of the library of Amoy University, when those scholars there had already excluded me from their clique.³

Lu Hsun

Written in White Cloud Pavilion, Kwangchow

May 1, 1927

² In March 1926 the Northern warlord government started to hound Lu Hsun and other progressives, forcing him to hide that spring in several hospitals one after another. When all the beds in one hospital were occupied, he stayed in a room there used as a carpenter's workshop.

³ While teaching in Amoy University, Lu Hsun was persecuted by its professors of the Hu Shih (1891-1962) clique.

Dogs, Cats, and Mice

Since last year I seem to have heard some people calling me a cat-hater. The evidence, naturally, was my tale "Rabbits and Cats,"¹ and this being a self-confession there was of course no defence to be made — but that worried me not at all. This year, however, I have begun to feel a little anxious. I cannot help scribbling from time to time, and when what I write is published it seldom scratches certain people where they itch but often strikes them on some sensitive spot. If I am not careful I may even offend celebrities and eminent professors or, worse still, some of the "elders responsible for guiding the youth."² And that would be extremely dangerous. Why so? Because these bigwigs are "not to be trifled with."³ Why are they "not to be trifled with"? Because they may become so incensed that they publish a letter in a paper announcing: "See! Don't dogs hate cats? Mr. Lu Hsun himself admits to hating cats yet he also ad-

¹ Included in the collection *Call to Arms*.

² Refers to professors such as Chen Hsi-ying and Hsu Chih-mo (1896-1931) of the Modern Critic clique who supported the Northern warlord government and attacked progressives.

³ A phrase used by Hsu Chih-mo to describe Chen Hsi-ying and to intimidate Lu Hsun.

vocates beating 'dogs that have fallen into the water'!" The subtlety of this "logic" lies in its use of words from my own mouth to prove me a dog, from which it follows that any defence I make is completely overturned. Even if I say two twos make four, three threes make nine, every single word is wrong. And since they are wrong, it follows naturally that those gentlemen are right when they claim that two twos make seven and three threes a thousand.

I tried to investigate the "motive" for their animosity. Far be it from me to ape the fashion of those modern scholars who use motive to belittle a work;⁴ I was simply trying to clear myself in advance. To my mind, this would have been an easy matter for an animal psychologist, but unfortunately I lacked that special knowledge. Eventually, however, I discovered the reason in Dr. O. Dähnhardt's *Folk Tales of Natural History* which tells the following tale. The animals called a meeting on important business. All the birds, fish, and beasts assembled with the exception of the elephant. They decided to draw lots to choose one of their number to fetch him, and this task fell to the dog. "How can I find the elephant?" asked the dog. "I've never set eyes on him and have no idea what he looks like." The others replied, "That's easy. He has a humped back." The dog went off and met a cat, which immediately arched its back; so he gave it the message and they went back together. But when he introduced this arched-back cat to the others as the elephant, they simply laughed at him. That was the start of the feud between dogs and cats.

⁴ Another reference to Chen Hsi-ying who had insinuated "His motives may be mixed. . . ." to belittle Lu Hsun's writings.

Although it is not very long since the Germans came out of their forests, their learning and art are already most impressive; even the binding of their books and the workmanship of their toys cannot fail to please. But this children's tale is really lacking in charm and offers such a futile reason for a feud. Since the cat did not arch its back to impose on others or give itself airs, the dog is to blame for a lack of acumen. Still, this counts as a reason of a sort. My own dislike of cats is very different.

In fact, no sharp distinction need be drawn between men and beasts. Although the animal kingdom is by no means as free and easy as the ancients imagined, there is less tiresome shamming there than in the world of men. Animals act according to their nature, and whether right or wrong never try to justify their actions. Maggots may not be clean, but neither do they claim to be immaculate. The way vultures and beasts prey on weaker creatures may be dubbed cruel, but they have never hoisted the banners of "justice" and "right"⁵ to make their victims admire and praise them right up to the time they are devoured. When man learned to stand upright, that was of course a great step forward. When he learned to speak, that was another great step forward. When he learned to write, that was yet another great step forward. But then degeneration set in, because that was the beginning of empty talk. Empty talk is not so bad, but sometimes one may unwittingly say something one doesn't really mean; in which case, compared with inarticulate beasts, men should certainly feel ashamed. If there really

⁵ Such terms were used by reactionary professors to cover up their true features.

is a Creator above who considers all creatures as equal, he may think these clever tricks of man rather uncalled for, just as in the zoo the sight of monkeys turning somersaults or female elephants curtsying, although it often raises a laugh, may at the same time make us uncomfortable or even sad, so that we think these uncalled-for tricks might well be dispensed with. However, being men we have to "close ranks against aliens" and try to justify ourselves as men do, according to the fashion of the time.

Now as to my antipathy for cats, I consider that I have ample reason for it, moreover it is open and above-board. First, a cat is by nature different from other wild creatures in that whenever it catches a sparrow or mouse instead of killing its victim outright it insists on playing with it, letting it go, catching it again, then letting it go again until tiring of this game it finally eats it. This is very like the bad human propensity for delighting in the misfortunes of others and spinning out their torment. Secondly, although cats belong to the same family as lions and tigers, they are given to such vulgarity! However, this may be owing to their nature. If cats were ten times their present size, there is really no knowing how they would behave. But these arguments may appear thought up at the moment of writing, although I believe they occurred to me earlier on. A sounder explanation perhaps is simply this: their caterwauling when mating has become such an elaborate procedure that it gets on people's nerves, especially at night when one wants to read or sleep. At such times I have to retaliate with a long bamboo pole. When two dogs mate in the street, idlers often belabour them with sticks. I once saw an etching of this by P. Brueghel the Younger entitled

Allegorie der Wollust, showing that such actions are and always have been common to China and all other countries.

Ever since that eccentric Austrian scholar Sigmund Freud advocated psychoanalysis — which Mr. Chang Shih-chao is said to have translated as “heart examination,” a fine, archaic-sounding term but one truly hard to understand — some of our celebrities and eminent professors have made use of it in their insinuations, suggesting that these actions must also perforce be attributed to sexual desire. Now, passing over the business of beating dogs to consider my beating of cats, this is solely on account of their caterwauling, quite devoid of malice aforethought, for my jealousy is not yet so inordinate. In these days when one is liable to be blamed at every move, I must proclaim this in advance. For instance, human beings too go through quite a lengthy procedure before mating. The new way is to write love-letters, at least one packet if not a whole sheaf; the old way was to “inquire names,” “send betrothal gifts,”⁶ kowtow and bow. When the Chiang family of Haichang had a wedding last year in Peking, they devoted three whole days to ceremonial calls and printed a red-covered Wedding Handbook with a preface in which they expatiated: “Fairly speaking, all rites should be elaborate. If simplicity were our aim, what need would there be for rites? . . . Thus all who are mindful of rites can rise to action. They should not descend to the level of the common herd who are too low for rites.” This did not enrage me, however, because I was not required to attend; and this shows that my hatred of cats is really very easily explained just by that caterwauling so close to my ears. The various

⁶ Customs in the old system of arranging matches.

rites others indulge in are not the affair of outsiders and don't worry me; but if someone comes and insists on reciting love-letters or bowing and scraping just as I want to read a book or sleep, I have to defend myself with a long bamboo pole too. Then there are people with whom I normally have little to do who suddenly send me a red invitation card to "the nuptials of our younger sister" or "our son's wedding," "craving the honour" of my company or "soliciting the attendance" of my whole family. I dislike these phrases with their "sinister implications" which embarrass me unless I spend some money.

However, all this belongs to the recent past. Looking further back, my hatred of cats dates from a time long before I could expound these reasons, when I was perhaps ten years old. The reason I clearly remember was very simple: because cats eat mice — ate my beloved small pet mouse.

In the West, it is said, they are not too fond of black cats. I have no idea how correct this is; but the black cat of Edgar Allan Poe's story is certainly rather fearsome. Japanese cats are adept at becoming spirits, and the cruelty with which these legendary "cat witches" devour men is even more terrifying. Although China too had "cat spirits" in ancient times, in recent years we very seldom hear of feline black magic; it seems the old craft has died out and they have turned honest. And yet as a child I felt no goodwill towards cats, which to me had something monstrous about them. It so happened that one summer evening during my childhood I was lying on a small table under the cool shade of a large fragrant osmanthus tree while my grandmother, seated beside me waving a plantain fan, regaled me with riddles and stories. Suddenly from the fragrant osmanthus tree we heard a

stealthy scratch of claws and two gleaming eyes descended through the darkness. I gave a start, while my grandmother broke off her tale to tell me a different story about cats.

"Did you know that the cat was the tiger's teacher?" she asked. "How could a child know that the cat was once the tiger's master? To start with the tiger couldn't do a thing, so he turned to the cat for help. Then the cat taught him how to pounce on, catch, and eat his prey, the way that it caught rats. After these lessons the tiger thought he had mastered all the skills and no other creature was a match for him except his master, the cat. If he killed the cat he would be cock of the walk. He made up his mind to it, and started stalking the cat. But the cat knew what he was up to. With one bound it leaped on to a tree, so that all the tiger could do was squat below glaring up. The cat hadn't taught all its skills: it hadn't taught the tiger to climb trees."

A good thing too, I thought. How lucky that the tiger was so impatient, otherwise a tiger might come crawling down from the fragrant osmanthus tree. Still this was all most alarming, I had better go indoors to sleep. It had grown darker; a breeze had sprung up, rustling the fragrant osmanthus leaves, and the mat on my bed must be cool enough for me to lie quietly without tossing and turning.

A room centuries old, dimly lit by a bean-oil lamp, is the happy hunting-ground of rats who scuttle to and fro squeaking, often giving themselves more arrogant airs than "celebrities and eminent professors." We kept a cat but it didn't earn its keep. Although my grandmother and other grownups complained of the way the rats gnawed through chests and stole food, that was no great crime in

my eyes, and no business of mine; besides it was no doubt the big rats who were to blame for these misdeeds, and I would not have them slanderously imputed to my pet mouse. My type of mouse, no larger than a thumb, mostly scurried about the floor and was not too afraid of people. The local name for them was *yinsbu*, and they were a different species from the monsters who lived in the roof. In front of my bed were pasted two coloured woodcuts. One, "The Marriage of Piggy," consisted almost entirely of long snouts and large ears, and I didn't think much of it. The other, "The Mouse's Wedding," was quite charming. Every single mouse in it, from the bridegroom and bride down to the best man, bridesmaids, guests and attendants, had the high cheekbones and slender legs of scholars, although they wore red jackets and green trousers. To my mind, these beloved mice of mine were the only ones capable of conducting such an elaborate ceremony. Nowadays, things are cruder. When I meet a wedding procession in the street, I simply view it as an advertisement for sexual intercourse and pay scant attention. At that time, however, my longing to see a "mouse's wedding" was so strong that I doubt whether it would have exhausted my patience even if the ceremonies had continued for three nights, as in the case of the Chiang family of Haichang. On the eve of the Lantern Festival⁷ I was always reluctant to go to sleep as I waited for that procession to emerge from under my bed. But all I saw were the same few mice wearing no clothes and parading the floor as usual, not attending any wedding apparently. When I could hold

⁷ According to folk-lore in the Yangtze Valley, this was the time for mice to get married.

out no longer I fell into a disappointed sleep, and when I opened my eyes again another day had dawned — the Lantern Festival. Perhaps when mice marry they do not issue invitations angling for congratulatory gifts, nor even welcome people really eager to watch. This I imagine has always been their way and to protest is useless.

As a matter of fact the great enemy of mice is not the cat. At the end of spring if you hear the squeaking described as “mice counting coppers” you will know that the butcher of rats has appeared on the scene. This sound, expressing the panic of despair, is not caused by confrontation with a cat. Although a cat is frightening, mice need only dart into a small hole to render it powerless. They have many chances to escape. Only that baneful butcher the snake, long, thin and about the same in circumference as a mouse, can go wherever mice go and is so tenacious in pursuit that few mice escape from it. By the time one hears the “counting of coppers,” the mouse is probably doomed.

Once I heard the “counting of coppers” from an empty room. When I opened the door and went in there was a snake on the beam. Lying on the floor I saw a mouse with blood trickling from one corner of its mouth, but still breathing. I picked it up and put it in a cardboard box where after a long time it came to. By degrees it was able to eat, drink and crawl about; and by the next day it seemed to have recovered. But it did not run away. When put on the ground it kept running up to people and climbing up their legs, right up to the knee. Placed on the dining-table, it would eat leftovers and lick the edges of bowls. Put on my desk, it would wander about freely and lick some of the ink being ground on the ink-stone. This amazed and delighted me. I had