




Liu Xiaobo: For Seventeen (Commemorating the Second Anniversary of 6/4)

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For Seventeen (Commemorating the Second Anniversary of 6/4)

给十七岁—“六•四”二周年祭

LIU XIAOBO (刘晓波)

(You didn't listen to your parents' warnings, jumped out the bathroom window, snuck away. When you fell, holding up a banner, you were just 17. But I lived; I am already 36. In the presence of your shade, to survive is a crime, and to give you a poem is even grosser shame. The living ought to keep their mouths shut, ought to listen to the murmurs from the grave. That I should write a poem for you! I am unfit. Your age, 17, is worth more than any word or work—more than anything that can be made.)

I live,
even sustain a certain notoriety.
I want the courage, or the quality,
to proffer a handful of flowers and a poem,
to come before a seventeen-year-old's faint grin,
though I know—I know—
Seventeen doesn't carry the slightest grudge.

Your age (seventeen) tells me this:
life is plain. It lacks splendor,
like gazing at a desert with no borders:
with no need for trees, no need for water,
no need for the dappled touch of flowers,
you take the sun's malice; that is all.

At seventeen, you fell on the road,
and so the way was lost.
At seventeen, eyes open in the mud,
you were peaceful as a book.
Here, in this world,
seventeen,
you clung to nothing,
nothing but your pure, white, spotless youth.

When, at seventeen, your breathing stopped—
well, it was like a miracle—
you had not lost hope.
The bullets ripped through the mountains,
convulsed the seas,
as, for a time, all the flowers in the world
took on one color only.
Seventeen, you didn't lose hope,
couldn't lose hope.
Take the love you never spent,
give it to your mother;
her hair is white now.

Your mother, who once locked you away.
Her line was broken
under the red and five-starred flag.
High and fine,
your mother,
your own blood,
shout-roused by your dying glance.
She carries with her your last will,
walks among all the tombs.
When she herself is ready to fall,
with your ghost breath
you brace her up,
you set her on the road.

Past age or youth,
past death,
Seventeen,
already
forever.

(June 1, 1991, late at night in Beijing.)

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