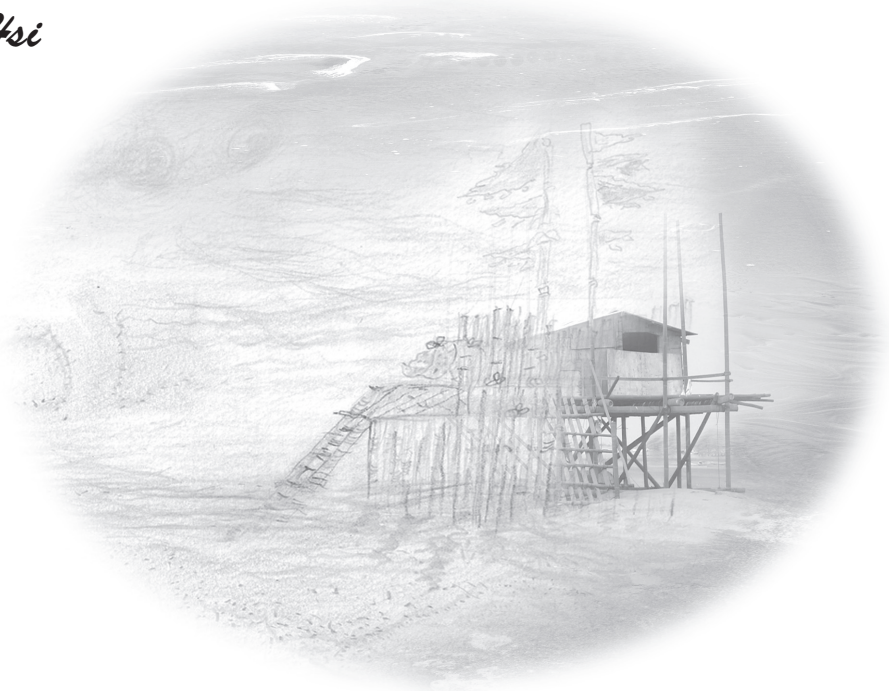


# *The Rain is the First to Know*

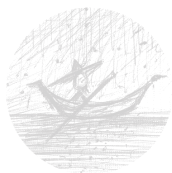
---

*Yu Hsi*



Translator : Kenneth G. Kraynak





## *The Rain is the First to Know*

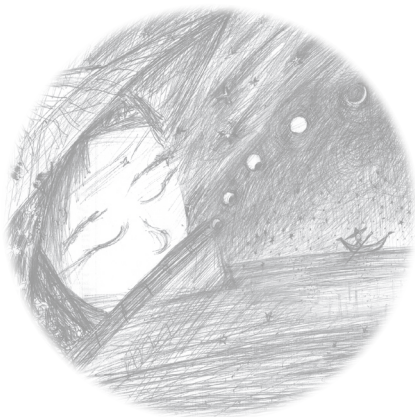
### Contents

---

Chapter I	<i>Winter Solstice, 1900</i>
Chapter II	<i>The Story of the Fisher-woman</i>
Chapter III	<i>Meeting in the First Month of 1947</i>
Chapter IV	<i>The Young Shamaness</i>
Chapter V	<i>An Hourglass in the Silvery Sea—The Legend of the Sun</i>
Chapter VI	<i>Black Bow's Homesickness</i>
Chapter VII	<i>The Victor of the Water World</i>
Chapter VIII	<i>The Inconceivable Channel</i>
Chapter IX	<i>The Grid of the Elevated Bamboo Houses in Spring</i>
Chapter X	<i>Meeting during the Lantern Festival</i>
Chapter XI	<i>The Fisher-woman's Wait · The Wind-settling Pearl</i>
Chapter XII	<i>The Mysterious Embodiment of the Leviathan</i>
Chapter XIII	<i>The Story of the Golden Hourglass</i>
Chapter XIV	<i>The Farmers' Almanac · The History of the Fishing People</i>
Chapter XV	<i>The Fragrant Sea at the Birth of Summer</i>
Chapter XVI	<i>Grandpa as a Youth at House Number 037</i>
Chapter XVII	<i>Blacky's Sonata on the Sea</i>
Chapter XVIII	<i>The Song of the Sea</i>
Chapter XIX	<i>North Kunshen, Changing Position, Rebirth</i>

---

Chapter XX	<i>Bubbles Arising on the Sea</i>
Chapter XXI	<i>Reminiscence of the Old Man of the Lighthouse</i> <i>—On the Frontier of a Dream</i>
Chapter XXII	<i>The Mysterious Celestial Body in an Ancient Palace</i>
Chapter XXIII	<i>The Ninth Wharf of the Sealed Dream</i>
Chapter XXIV	<i>The Mysterious Eye of the Milky Way</i>
Chapter XXV	<i>1974 – The Legend of the Quasar</i>
Chapter XXVI	<i>The Weeping Pearl</i>
Chapter XXVII	<i>The Ancient Compass and the Hourglass in the Water</i>
Chapter XXVIII	<i>The Navel of the Sea</i>
Chapter XXIX	<i>The Rose on the Shoal</i>
Chapter XXX	<i>Kunshen's Eternal Concern – The Merman's Quest</i>
Chapter XXXI	<i>The Wondrous Undercurrent – Dreaming of an Ancient Waterway</i>
Chapter XXXII	<i>The Merman's Revolving Emotions</i>
Chapter XXXIII	<i>Return to the Frontier Islet</i>
Chapter XXXIV	<i>The Ninth Day of the Birth of Autumn</i>
Chapter XXXV	<i>The 28-bow Umbrella in the Water-sky Mirror</i>
Chapter XXXVI	<i>Sounding the White Conch of the Dharma</i>
Chapter XXXVII	<i>Dreaming in a Dream The Ancient Mirror of the Moon</i>



# *The Rain is the First to Know*

© Yu Hsi

## Chapter I

### **Winter Solstice, 1900**

*The Treasure Seeker asks the mariners to count the number of spindrifts along the shore where we have landed—*

*One, two, three, four, eight, sixty-four, eighty-four thousand—  
as incalculable as the grains of sand in the Ganges.*

In the log is written “Winter Solstice, 1900.”

Off in the distance, three boats and eight rafts, rising and falling on the waves.

On the surface of the water the declining sun paints a thick crimson reflection.

Suddenly, the dense wandering clouds

transform into layer upon layer of mountain silhouettes.

In an instant the scintillating light riding the waves gives way to the reflection of the moon,

as the waves pounding on the sandy shore go from deep red to milky white.

Among the billowing waves

there appears to be a motionless blue whale;

in a moment, the setting sun becomes a golden drum descending into the ocean depths.

This year, in these waters, on the night of the Summer Solstice  
the cloud-adorned sky is unusually bright and effulgent,

as the blue-green water sinks ever deeper.  
Having no harbor in which to take shelter,  
we land on this shore of silvery water and golden sand, resembling an open umbrella.

Under the moonlight, the glimmering ocean reflects a splendid scene;  
a fine and hazy mist shrouding this living water-mirror.  
As the rows of whitecaps pulsate in the wind,  
a mysterious song arises from within the surging tide:  
“Kunshen, Kunshen, a spirit deep asleep for a thousand years,  
the beautiful goddess of these waters  
who will never forsake us.  
Resplendent as the North Star,  
the embodiment of beauty in this new era. Our fate is in your hands.”

This shoal is like an hourglass turned on its side,  
its umbrella like the leeward face of a sail.  
In the pure and bright moonlight is hidden the water-sky,  
the abode of myriads of things.  
The flowing tide, forever pursuing the moonlight;  
moonlight settling on the canopy stretched out over a fishing boat.  
All of a sudden, the sound of a drop of water plunging into the water-sky,  
sending forth spindrifts in all directions.

Just after dawn,  
I stand at the juncture of the golden sands and silvery sea,  
as the enormous sun swallows the moon,  
as golden waves stir silvery billows.

See those spindrifts,  
each as animated as the next;

endless waves, surging waters.

A ship heads out towards some bright point in the distance,  
as three layers of clouds emit three shades of light,  
and a mysterious plume of light appears on the sea.

Standing on the shoal, rising up like an umbrella,  
I see a stringless bow shoot off a headless arrow.  
You, the beautiful Kunshen Maiden, are everything.  
Oh embodiment of beauty in this new era,  
our fate is in your hands.

Here, there is no ancient civilization;  
just new life coming and going.  
See the profoundly quiet golden sand  
racing through this silvery sea, this bejeweled mirror.

See the billowing waves coming and going  
along the length and breadth of this umbrella-shoal.  
See the bright, mirrorlike ocean  
subtly transforming the azure-blue water-sky  
into a dark shade of green.

At noon, as the swelling tide licks my toes,  
I lightly stroke the surface of the water with my fingers,  
tender, fine, and glossy.  
See that thunder off in the distance cleaving asunder the vault of the sky,  
as magical arrays of light appear on this water plaited with innumerable waves.  
A fiery liquid  
courses through the gullies on the shoal.

In an instant, the Lanhai is launched back out to sea.

The crew has already set the sails into the wind and pulled in the anchor.  
On the umbrella-top of the shoal the mariners have found  
a mysterious waxy glob, huge and misshapen.  
It turns out to be the whales' pearl, a chunk of gold floating on the sea,  
a mysterious substance spit up from the mouth of a whale—ambergris.

Afternoon waves,  
white reduplicating white;  
on the horizon layer upon layer of green and azure blue.  
As the sprightly spindrift dances happily, the Treasure Seeker says to the mariners:  
"These waters are full of innumerable hidden treasures. All the same, it's time to  
set sail."

In a moment, sails move as swift as the wind.  
See the sparkling flashes of naked blades  
fencing within the shadows of a thousand waves,  
as a stream of pure white pierces the azure surface of the water.  
The whirling billows invert heaven and earth,  
as the wind blows eastwards, towards a great hazy light.

See those 53 mysterious good friends on the Lanhai,  
drifting past those two distant mountains rising up above the sea of clouds.  
Waisanding, a sand bar, as beautiful as a shapely woman.  
See the first rays of sunlight pulling up a supernatural red rope from the bottom of  
the sea,  
as the Treasure Seeker predicts  
that something good is going to happen on these golden sands and silvery sea.

Kunshen, Kunshen, oh beautiful Kunshen,  
soon a youth with a black bow will come to keep you company,  
and a merman will come and be your guest.



You, the beautiful Kunshen Maiden, are everything.  
Oh embodiment of beauty in this new era,  
our fate is in your hands.

On the mast of the elevated Bamboo House  
are glimmering beads of sweet dew  
stuffed with the rosy clouds filling the sky,  
looking lovely and delicious.  
This shoal is a world  
entirely permeated with the dreams of the fishermen.

Tonight is a special occasion for the fishing families;  
everyone goes out on the sea and launches floating lanterns,  
praying for blessings, safety, and prosperity.  
All sorts of childhood memories  
come flooding into the dream realm tonight.

That night thirteen years ago,  
waves rolling down a slick wall of water;  
tide surging like a watery curtain;  
waves curveting like the screen of a waterfall,  
mighty currents colliding head-on.  
Suddenly, the rudders of all the boats lose their force,  
the resplendent whitecaps instantly swallow up the blue water.

Then there was that dreamlike and trackless moonshadow;  
wave wrestling with tide;  
billow sparring with wave;  
a mass of dancing waters gracefully mounting the shoreline and vying to touch the  
sky;  
bursts of wind and rain arresting the waves around the edges;

sheet after sheet of water hurrying back home against the incoming waves,  
gradually enticed by the centrifugal force,  
out of the sea and into rivers and lakes.

The incessant rumbling of the waves  
vigorously agitating this body of water.  
Dense clouds delimiting a vast piece of sky,  
as force-17 gusts  
roar and howl.

Waves connected into 13 layers,  
each layer barring a means of escape.  
A contest at any moment,  
waves endlessly pursuing waves,  
all having forgotten their way back home.  
The fleeing masses of foam  
become fantastic shooting stars.  
An avalanche of whitecaps pounds against an undulating boat,  
rafts engulfed by the waves,  
twisted out of shape.  
Shoal no longer shoal,  
already become an hourglass flowing backwards  
in the countdown of the God of Destruction.  
Kunshen is no longer Kunshen, no longer beautiful,  
everywhere ravaged and exposed...

It was on that night,  
that moonless night of rain and thunder,  
when vessels coming from afar found no place to harbor;  
when all the fishing boats had broken their ropes;  
that night of force-19 gales  
and pounding rain.

That was the night  
when it was so dark that you couldn't even see your outstretched hand;  
when all the fishing boats had their lamps blown out,  
enveloped in that frightful abyss of darkness,  
a darkness so dense that it could barely be penetrated by the flashes of lightning.  
In a fit of anger, this body of water suddenly swallowed all the creatures in the sea.

It was on that pitch-black night  
that the Merman brought a backwards-flowing hourglass,  
bringing time back to the eternal moment, bit by bit.  
On that night I was in the elevated Bamboo House on the Waisanding sand bar..  
A thousand fishing boats drifting leisurely under the moonlight,  
the water singing its atonal, a cappella song,  
sending forth a resonating symphony of energy.

A thousand sails swaying on this body of water,  
setting in motion the waves and billows.  
Suddenly, the evening sky kicks up a gale,  
sending all the fishing boats still at sea back to the shoal.  
At dusk, a migratory bird leaves behind a colorful feather  
on the boat 137.  
A fisherman picks it up and brings it home for his wife,  
who places it in her topknot.  
With this her plume,  
as splendid as an empress,  
she passes 81 years, satisfied and happy.  
The Summer Solstice is long gone,  
and the typhoons have begun to appear.  
Under the blazing sun the wind blows up the waves,  
pervasive and vast,  
fishing boats hurriedly take up anchor before the thunder and lightning begins.

Ripples of light leave behind lovely images in the clouds,  
as the churning foam brings forth the sound of paddles.  
The tide comes to the beach and sounds an applause,  
as the foam sings out from atop the waves.  
A thousand boats, a thousand fishermen pulling oars, a thousand voices calling out.  
Presently, the sea has three types of moisture: clouds, fog, and dew;  
presently, thunder, lightning, and wind mingle in the sky,  
even as the setting sun continues to emit its flames.  
In an instant, a magical color emerges from behind the clouds,  
as a powerful and bitter wind blows.  
A thousand sails, a thousand boats leaping over endless waves;  
one after another,  
raft raft raft oar oar oar;  
struggling along in groups of twos and threes;  
the hull high and low; the reflection in the water up and down.  
See that water-mirror, bright and effulgent;  
coated with layer upon layer of fog-like opaqueness—when, and by whose hand, I  
know not.  
In distant waters, a wave is transformed into phoenix feathers fluttering in all  
directions;  
a billow is transformed into a jeweled sword slicing open the azure surface of the  
water all about.  
See this placid body of water, in an instant topped with graceful waves,  
endless foam, and innumerable bubbles,  
all returning to the state of water; empty, yet full of life.  
A golden-yellow kettle drum has appeared on the surface of the water—when, I  
know not.  
At dusk, as usual, the setting sun dazzles the seafarers vision.  
See those watery arrows, newly thrown up, slicing up the placid mirror sea.  
Suddenly, a thousand waves cluster together and form a silvery bow,  
as the Ferryman uses his pair of oars to lightly rock in the trough in between the  
waves,

singing out the marvelous song composed by the ripples.  
See the Ferryman in between the rising and falling waves,  
conjuring up the sound of the tide.  
On this great body of water,  
there often appears a dreamlike moonlight.

On that night, the force-17 winds  
turn into the claws of a demon,  
churning up monstrous waves  
and tempestuous billows,  
launching a surprise attack on the Kunshen Maiden just off the coast.  
The outgoing current collides with the incoming waves,  
instantly joining forces,  
squeezing Kunshen's cheeks,  
forming small dimples.  
See the youthful Black Bow opening the scroll of the ocean of dreams.  
One moment the fog drifts up into a mist;  
one moment the misty fog floats away.  
Every scroll is full of the old taste of a primordial memory.  
See the Ferryman, that master mariner, dancing with the waves, trifling with the  
billows,  
single-handedly piloting his skiff over the tops of the waves,  
suddenly engulfed by a mysterious whirlpool.  
Following the mood of the sea, the waves and tide swiftly react;  
billows gradually form an arc,  
waves rise up to form a peak.  
Black Bow transforms into a giant whale,  
and transports the skiff of the Ferryman, that master mariner,  
onto the Kunshen Maiden.  
The surging waves pull each other along;  
in an instant, the trough between the tides is transformed.

Here there are 333 houses built by the fishing people,  
all made out of moso bamboo from Zhushan.  
Homes elevated on stilts, simple yet remarkable,  
verandas joined by walkways of halved bamboos doubling as gutters for collecting  
water.

The Fisher-woman came to the sandbar at the age of 17 pursuing the spindrift,  
when all the combination locks had the same number: 037.

The Fisher-woman has never been depressed,  
has never been sad.

Your treasure is the happiness of being content with who you are.  
See the fisherman, fishing hat blown away by the westerly wind,  
fishing shoes swept away by the autumn tide,  
beaming smile, all the same.

Praising this world of water and sand,  
at dusk the Fisher-woman likes to sit alone and contemplate the setting sun,  
imagining that the golden drum remains fixed in the sky,  
never sinking into the sea.

See the evening breeze shuttling between the waves,  
several colorful clouds brought in and set in place by the wind.  
Golden sand and silvery sea under brilliant rays of red,  
supporting a mysterious umbrella.

The verandas of the elevated bamboo houses are connected to an elevated walkway,  
linking up the 333 homes into one big family.

Today at dusk,  
the Fisher-woman visualizes the setting sun to be a glowing ball of fire.  
A *Volaticotherium antiquus*<sup>1</sup> flew onto the shoal—I know not when—  
and devoured the fish caught with much toil.  
Here on the shoal there are no outside authorities,  
apart from heaven and the ancient sage-kings Yao and Shun.  
In this sandy world,

---

1. An ancient gliding mammal of the Jurassic period.

the Volaticotherium antiquus gets its fill.  
It's said that tomorrow the Peach Blossom Sister is coming to visit the Fisher-  
woman;  
the ferryman is beside himself with joy,  
telling everyone he meets, "Right early in the mornin' I'm goin' over to the Lagoon  
at Haomeiliao to pick 'er up."  
That night, under a starry sky, the Fisher-woman lights a lamp to honor the Big  
Dipper,  
lights incense, beseeching the Water God for calm waters tomorrow,  
lighting incense and supplicating the Sea God to prop up the clouds  
and provide the Ferryman, that master mariner, with favorable winds.  
Instantly, the Lanhai begins to settle down,  
several clouds appear in the sky,  
the water once again lucid and calm.  
The subtle abilities of the fishing folk are beyond the ken of most people.  
See the Ferryman's boat under the moonlight chasing the wind,  
nimble passing over twisting waves, billows, swells,  
rakishly gliding into the tidal flats.  
The boat of the Ferryman is a family heirloom.  
Although its hull has seen better days,  
it's said that the oar rack  
was fashioned by Luban, the patron saint of Chinese craftsmen.  
When it was new, a gauzelike membrane was applied to its hull,  
making it completely buoyant and unsinkable.  
At the center of the boat is a mast  
made from an ancient mulberry branch,  
supporting the sky,  
propping up a canopy.  
On clear and calm nights  
the Ferryman soars like a kite  
over the surface of the water,

a mirror blessed by the Fisher-woman and protected by the Water God and the Sea God.

Tonight in the Bamboo House

the kerosene lamps dispel the darkness;

at the center of the shoal, a large stone drum reverberates,

beaten by the surf of the rising tide.

In the air, there floats something white, foglike; now transparent, now translucent;

in the early morning, the tide recedes, removing the shoal's watery blanket.

In the inverted dream of the Fisher-woman,

all of a sudden, from out of this sheet of placid water

there comes floating up a parasol made of innumerable diamondlike grains of sand,  
hanging upside down in between the sky and the sea.

Small boats chasing large boats,

small waves swallowing large waves.

See the Ferryman hurtling over the sand banks with all his might, ferrying the  
Peach Blossom Sister,

her hands tightly gripping the Ferryman's shoulders,

laughing and shouting,

"Fisher-woman, I'm coming!"

Looking out into the distance, the Fisher-woman observes

boats and rafts briskly gliding through the spindrift amongst the green waves,

the azure sea—limpid, transparent, and empty, yet full of life.

The Peach Blossom Sister says that she will spend the night at the house of the  
Fisher-woman;

the Ferryman says he will do the same.

On the shores of the shoal,

countless fishing boats come and go,

traversing a secret channel that only the local fishermen know.

See the waves spreading out and coming back;

see the billows dancing about, seeking a sound, wandering about.



Illuminated by the sun, the water-mirror, square or round, big or small,  
at times displaying myriads of images,  
at times quite blank.

It's at this time that the Ferryman, the Peach Blossom Sister, and the Fisher-woman  
all hear the heartbeat of the sea,  
highly subtle and mysterious.

Yu Hsi

December 30, 2006

January 11, 2007. As previously arranged, we return to our forsaken hometown.  
At the tiny harbor,  
a young girl turns a parasol while nimbly putting on a flower-drum<sup>2</sup> performance.  
Along the coast, arch-shaped billows and bow-shaped waves,  
elicit our echoing memories,  
as a thick purple fog obscures the cloudy sky.  
You say that the whitecaps are the wings of the butterfly  
that brought you here;  
you say that the vermilion billows are the dragonfly's lovely attire.  
As the rising sun welcomes us,  
you say that you are Kunshen as a young girl,  
come over from the Palace of the Moon, from the Ocean of Milk, from beyond  
time and space.  
Like a pet bird, you stay close to my breast,  
as though lovers returned to the Phoenix Waterfall, there to sport;  
only through love does sorrow vanish.  
See the opaque mist embellishing the edges of the rainbow;  
a love having waited 111 years, in an instant blazes forth.  
Hear that sentiment, bunched, intimate, sweet, like a gentle breeze.  
Your words enter my ears,  
knowing that the secret of true love ferments for a century

---

2. A folk-art form of monologue entertainment, narrating a story to the accompaniment of a small drum.

and then spills forth from a point in the blue-green stillness.

In that forsaken hometown,  
a miraculous curtain has appeared in the Phoenix Waterfall,  
in which a rainbow reflects the number “11022011.”  
On the edge of the curtain is a sparkling dew.  
Straddling the point in front of the waterfall where the thousand rivulets divide,  
I firmly embrace you,  
my bosom companion on the mountain of the spirit,  
the expression in your eyes bringing joy to life.  
The beating of the heart follows the rhythm of love,  
the magnificent secret of love.  
Today, 111 years of sentiment is brought out afresh,  
a pure and flawless love liberating an ancient dream.  
Today, our old promise to one another  
is finally brought to fulfillment.  
See the light flush in your face,  
like the rosy clouds of dawn.  
See your expression transfixed on that point in the blue-green stillness,  
in a moment, making up for the deficiency of 111 years,  
forthwith, filling in the yearning of 111 years.

We return to that imaginary place of lore,  
tasting the flavor of that fishing village sealed away for 111 years.  
All the children here learn to fish at an early age.  
I, the Merman, see that the fishing people here are nothing if not honest and simple;  
you, the Kunshen Maiden, see that the businessmen  
are nothing if not eager to turn a profit.  
You say that 37 years ago, in 1970, businessmen from some far-off place  
wanted to remove all the sand from this shoal.

It was once a village of 333 fishing families;  
all that remains is number 37,  
the once-lovely Bamboo House,  
now forlorn, used by fishermen for storage and taking a rest.  
Hands joined, we stroll on the beach,  
where a raft pulls a net;  
fish jumping in the water,  
a joy shared by you, I, and the fish.  
Today the coast is being influenced by the northeast monsoon,  
again causing sand to pile up in this forsaken hometown.  
You say that long ago  
the local oyster farmers switched from using Japanese silver grass to using lengths  
of bamboo stuck in the sand,  
and that some 37 years ago  
this was again replaced by flat or vertical hanging racks.  
Taking me by the hand, you lead me from the shallows to the sun-baked flats,  
where fiddler crabs briskly gambol about.  
The tide comes in and goes out goes out and comes in,  
the waves rise and recede recede and rise.  
You say that there were once 333 elevated bamboo houses here,  
now all but forgotten  
in all the 319 cities, towns, and villages of mainland Taiwan.  
These 333 families set up their own village,  
a little world of their own.  
They came from the estuary,  
from where they set out to sea every day.  
Today that shoal, that umbrella on the sea,  
all but forgotten in the 319 cities, towns, and villages of Taiwan.  
At that time the far-ranging Lanhai mistook the shoal for a legendary enchanted  
city;  
at that time, around the time of the Summer Solstice, the oysters were at their  
plumpest and tastiest;

at that time, around the time of the Winter Solstice, the fishermen brought in  
mullet by the bucketful,  
waiting until the Birth of Spring<sup>3</sup>  
to take their glittering, precious cargo to market.

“Merman, Merman,” you gently call out next to my ear,  
saying that I’m your eternal loved one,  
and that long ago the forsaken hometown went floating far out to sea.  
See that vast azure body of water,  
the waves concealing a bundle of green snake swords,  
billows holding a pearl in red water.  
See the tide coming in, going out,  
a red flag and a blue flag flashing out.  
Taking me by the waist,  
you lead me over to the lee side of the highest sand dune,  
where we find a deep-green beach morning glory,  
its flared red and yellow flowers in full bloom.  
As several skipper butterflies, arrived from points unknown, dance in the wind,  
you ask me to ascend the lighthouse atop the highest point on the shoal  
and survey this forsaken village, lost to time.  
Peering out as far as the eye can see,  
I tell my dear one  
11.1 kilometers long  
1.11 kilometers wide.  
You say that this is all that remains of 111 years of memories.  
Just now, someone is on the sand flats holding up an umbrella  
on the hood of which is written “11022011,”  
the mysterious numbers on that sky-driven sail soaring up in pursuit of the clouds.  
Today, the sixth day of the Lesser Cold<sup>4</sup>,  
a powerful low-pressure system moves into the mysterious Taiwan Strait;  
when the sun goes down the air temperature drops to 23 degrees.

---

3. The 1st of the 24 two-week periods (solar terms) in the Chinese lunar calendar, approximately February 4th to February 18th in the Gregorian calendar.

4. The 23rd of the 24 two-week periods in the Chinese lunar calendar, approximately January 6th to January 19th in the Gregorian calendar.

I pull out an overcoat and bundle you inside;  
we agree to fulfill our promise to one another on November 2, 2011.

Chinese New Year's Eve, dusk sees off the last glow of the sunset;  
the first day of the Chinese New Year, 1937,  
dawn ushers in the first rays of the sun.  
Waisanding, studded with elevated bamboo houses,  
333 fishing families,  
punters and clam pickers too.  
The Ferryman is here, as are the Peach Blossom Sister,  
the Lighthouse Keeper, and the Oyster Monger.  
This year, the Itinerant Poet and the Novelist are also here;  
word has it that they've come to seek out that mysterious Grandma of the Night.  
333 friendly families come aground on this labyrinth of golden sand and silvery sea.  
See the glowing sun dancing its fiery dance over the placid sea.  
The Merman searches for the Wind-settling Pearl to pacify the moody sea;  
a fisherman scours for a compass which always points towards the lovely Kunshen.  
On the third day  
of the Chinese New Year celebration,  
a large number of fishing boats hurriedly set out to sea,  
not returning until sunset.  
See the bamboo rafts with their nets and ropes aboard.  
Today the waves are unusually calm,  
as the boats of the fishermen saunter about on the mirrorlike water singing a  
fishing song.  
The Itinerant Poet and the Novelist study the self-discipline of the surf,  
pulling in the oar rolling rolling rolling...  
See the fishing folk of the shoal amidst the silvery sea,  
all equipped with an extraordinary boat which never fails.  
See the worn-out bamboo deck chair on the Ferryman's boat,  
on which sits the Peach Blossom Sister,

taking advantage of the calm seas to come out to the shoal and visit the Fisher-woman.

Knowing that the Peach Blossom Sister is on her way,  
the Fisher-woman lights a lamp in supplication to the Water God and pays homage to the Big Dipper.

The Merman sits alone atop the shoal, gazing at the boundless sea,  
as the dazzling glow of dusk fills the sky.

All of a sudden, a fish market springs up on the edge of the shoal,  
as fish traders hurry over from Budai and Dongshi,  
buying up all the fish and taking them away in no time at all,  
leaving behind nothing but the emptied bamboo rafts  
and the thin, moonless clouds.

See the fishermen returning to their elevated bamboo houses,  
piously gazing at the moonlit sea,  
seeking out in this body of water  
the most profound mysteries of the universe.

The Fisher-woman tells the Peach Blossom Sister the old story of how the great roc<sup>5</sup> became Kunshen.

The Itinerant Poet and the Novelist fail to find Grandma of the Night,  
instead, listening to the Merman quietly relating stories about the search for the Wind-settling Pearl.

It was during the Birth of Spring of that year  
when a group of king crabs came up from the depths of the sea and appeared at the shoal.

Wave upon wave rends asunder the azure surface of the water,  
spewing forth countless snowy-white spindrifts.

It was on that night that the sky was dyed with charcoal,  
in an instant this entire body of water covered in pitch black.

You are the Kunshen Maiden,

---

5. A mythical bird of giant size and terrific flying power.

this is Black Bow,  
I am the Merman who once kissed you in a dream.  
Your lips lightly pressed my cheek,  
holding my waist firmly in your hands,  
the tip of my nose gliding over your forehead,  
the expression in your eyes exuding a love boundless and sweet.  
You want me to tell you the secret of life;  
we promise each other to meet 111 years hence,  
under the padauk tree,  
on the great resting stone, as dark and cool as a lacquered piano.

You place my overcoat on the captivating darkness  
of the great resting stone.  
We tightly embrace,  
feeling the heat of each other's bodies;  
your whispering lips next to my ear;  
my face lightly pressed against your ear,  
attentively listening to the interplay of the waves and the tide.  
Arrived at complete intimacy,  
a palpitating joy bursting forth,  
a torrent of ardor flooding through the veins.  
See the pointed waves emitting beams of light,  
see the bow-shaped billows teasing the night sky.  
The captivating darkness retreats,  
replaced by the gentle moonlight...  
Your waist still tightly pressed against my hand;  
a cherished moment,  
a sweet experience.

The last time you came to see me you were wearing a black, one-piece dress;  
today you are wearing a white pants suit.

It's a deep hug after a long separation;  
it's the affirmation of endless gentle speech after a long separation,  
soft, fine, continuous, intimate.  
You say that I am your eternal explorer,  
in possession of the key to all your deepest secrets.  
On that night, under the moonlight you transformed yourself into a flaming  
phoenix and carried me up to into the sky;  
suddenly, your wings became two long, snow-white waves descended from the  
heavens,  
surging forth like a waterfall in full spate.  
A couple sporting in the Phoenix Waterfall,  
You and I, alone in the universe.  
Instantly, the vapor and sound spreads all about;  
from the expression in your eyes I sense true love.  
You say that I am a bow-shaped man a man-shaped bow the flaming red dragon.  
Suddenly, the sky changes color,  
as a fine red light emerges from the great mist to the east.  
The snowy peaks of the waves in continuous fluctuation,  
the silvery layers of the tide ever shifting.  
Nakedness, the red glow of dawn, the washed golden sands of the shoal.  
Moisture, the transparent garments  
covering you, the Kunshen Maiden, and I, the Merman...

I am the Merman you are the Kunshen Maiden.  
On that night in the Birth of Spring,  
when I kissed you for the first time,  
you spit into my mouth a mysterious Wind-settling Pearl,  
an intuitive, unspoken knowing.  
You say that you are about to leave me,  
and we promise each other to meet 111 years henceforth.  
It's neither the white phoenix nor the flaming phoenix;



from this time onwards the lovely Kunshen lacked your presence.

Merman, Merman    Wind-settling Pearl in your mouth, yet searching for it everywhere:

from 1896 to 1900 to 1937...

This is a story from 1937 about the Merman's search for the Wind-settling Pearl.

\*

That year, on the night of the Winter Solstice,  
under the silver tree encircled with spiraling lights,  
Black Bow says that she wants to go west by herself for a few years  
and experience the life of a vagabond.

On that long, long night,  
both of us full of the emotion of impending separation,  
underneath that silver tree resembling a twisted lamp wick,  
she embraces me tightly,  
her fire-red face squeezed up against my cheek,  
and gives me an affectionate kiss.

She says that she wants to taste the rich flavors of some far-off place,  
and then share it with me.

She says that I am her eternal and true refuge,  
and that from tonight onwards she will be counting down the number of days until  
she returns.

She takes with her a lapis lazuli vase  
with which to store

all the torrents of love and all the boundless joy  
she collects over the course of several thousand days,  
combined with a myriad of thoughts, ideas, memories, reflections,  
so that when we finally meet again, she can uncork the bottle and let them all pour  
out.

She says that she will also take a magical combination lock

with which to securely lock up her heart and make it inscrutable to outsiders.  
Although it is winter,  
on that night I give her a beautiful flower umbrella,  
the ribs fashioned out of whale bones  
collected on the shoal,  
the cover made out of the waterproof cloth brought by the Peach Blossom Sister,  
the handle thickly smeared with ambergris.  
I know that through this period of separation she will gradually mature.  
She says that she wants to cultivate her body, mind, and spirit,  
and that she wants to bring her beautiful dreams to realization.  
She also takes a watch which moves backwards,  
marking that the movement of cherished memories from tonight onwards.  
She says that she is ready to set off on the next available boat,  
but doesn't yet know where she'll be staying...

On the night boat,  
she dreams of a city of sand in the middle of the sea.  
See that second hand on the watch continually shaking out the traces of time.  
In her toned skin and muscles  
lingers the mood of that first embrace.  
On the night boat,  
she takes off her golden-thread shoes with high heels and red soles  
and puts on a pair of light blue slippers;  
no longer watching the scenery outside the cabin, she gently closes her eyes.  
She dreams of a city of sand rising up in the middle of the sea,  
a memory of that very first meeting.  
She once said to me that she would make her naked body  
into that happy, rolling wheel of time.  
She says that she will go to a cafe far away,  
smoke a hookah,  
and cultivate an addiction;

for this is the result of so much stored up yearning.  
She says that she passed two nights,  
three boats, and three time zones  
before reaching her destination.

It's a different sort of wilderness, completely different from the shoal;  
it's a new experience, but she still can't forget about me.  
That night, she stays at a youth castle,  
with lots of splendid green trees  
surrounding red brick houses;  
charming, but in a different way than the Bamboo House on the shoal.  
During the Lesser Cold,  
every morning she is woken up by migrating wild geese flying by.  
She says that early one morning she opened the window  
and saw the huge full moon hanging on a tree branch.  
She went out and went towards the east, where she saw the huge glowing sun—  
a genuinely fascinating experience.  
Walking on a road, luxuriant and lush,  
on both sides of which she unexpectedly saw a great number of trees laden with  
plums,  
setting off that strong longing for me;  
unable to reign in her emotion, she paced back and forth below the trees.

Her yearning spills over into a message on a tableau:

“See the migrating geese flying overhead,  
resting together under the trees,  
at dusk flying up in a V-formation,  
passing the night I know not where.”

“This is what I saw at that moment—a tree of blue plums covered by a coat of  
frost,  
plums firmly strung together,

delivering a load of yearning.”

“This is a place for vagabonding;  
surrounding the red brick houses  
are staggered trees, set with emeralds green and gray;  
perhaps when spring arrives  
it will become a luxuriant green,  
through and through.”

“A mysterious steeple,  
with a restaurant, bookstore, bank, post office, and hair salon;  
a deep place in the heart,  
for lingering in yearning;  
now sitting on the sofa writing these lines,  
while the fair-haired girl next to me eats a sandwich.”

☺♥ L♥ny┘

Our party of six arrives at the forsaken hometown for a visit,  
as a large white crane greets us while flying overhead.  
Some small turtledoves come over to play,  
as if with old friends.  
At dusk, when we return to the monastery on the mountain,  
they follow close behind,  
seemingly unwilling to leave our company.  
After some time, they fall asleep right next to me,  
and suddenly transform into horned turtles resembling Japanese rhinoceros beetles.  
One of the round turtles  
clamors all over the table made of railroad ties.  
Thinking of some way to save them  
and take them back to their home,  
I suddenly remember an ancient bronze scale fitted with dew-receiving pans on  
each side.  
I place a turtle onto each of the pans and try to lift it up,

only to discover that it's too heavy to carry.  
So I ask the others to weave some bamboo baskets  
to replace the bronze pans.  
At the center of the scale's bar is a loop,  
into which I insert  
one of my walking sticks.  
It fits just right,  
but it's too heavy for one person to carry,  
so I nominate the most robust of the students to help carry it,  
one of us on each end of the stick.

As night begins to fall we hurriedly pool our efforts;  
two people weaving two bamboo baskets,  
two people watching the large white crane and the small turtledove,  
now transformed into a horned turtle and a round turtle;  
the other person prepares a lamp.  
While I'm deliberating on how to get them to sit still on the dew collectors,  
the two students get distracted and lose track of the two turtles;  
after we rush about searching confusedly, the turtles reappear.  
When the bamboo baskets are finally finished  
we separately place the turtles into the baskets, and place the baskets on the two  
dew collectors.  
With a student on one end of the stick, myself on the other, we hoist it onto our  
shoulders;  
everybody claps and sings as we hurriedly follow the moonlight back to the  
mountain monastery.  
As soon as we arrive at the monastery gate,  
as the faint light of dawn is already appearing in the east,  
we discover that the two turtles  
have disappeared without a trace.  
Looking up to the majestic mountain,

we notice that there is an additional white crane amidst the verdant greenery,  
and that there is an additional turtledove amongst the blooming red flowers of the  
creeping wood sorrels.

“Bamboo walking stick,  
a scale (bronze pan versus bamboo basket),  
selecting someone to shoulder the other end,  
the large white crane and the small turtledove change form.  
From that forsaken hometown we return to the monastery on the mountain.  
A bronze scale,  
its two dew collectors overweight,  
a table made of old railroad ties.  
Dreamed in the early morning on January 30, 2001;  
two people weaving light bamboo baskets to replace the bronze dew collectors,  
a table made of old railroad ties...”

The Lesser Heat<sup>6</sup>, 1937 part of the world at war,  
all the migratory birds on the island on the move,  
the one-night nest empty.  
See those puppeteers toying with their 37 puppets; 37, again 37.  
Huge waves surge forth from far out at sea and soak the Bamboo House,  
whitecaps like falling snow or a smiling white rose.  
In the early morning the shoal is covered by the magical silver wings of a butterfly,  
right up until the sun rises in the misty east,  
when the dispirited waves roll up and retreat.  
I am the Merman, come to quell this great body of water and its watery nature,  
in search of the Kunshen Maiden in her original form,  
unaware that you, the Kunshen Maiden, while invisible,  
gathered together everything that will come pass,  
formed it into a type of mysterious coefficient,  
and placed it inside a precious champagne bottle.

---

6. The 11th of the 24 two-week periods in the Chinese lunar calendar, approximately July 7th to July 22nd in the Gregorian calendar.

The Lesser Heat, the Lesser Heat, the huge sun hanging in the firmament;  
the water-sky, an empty blue-green, the sun clear in form.  
The shoal has already shed its silvery butterfly wings,  
exchanging them for golden garments dyed in sunlight.  
Black Bow picks up an old box, intending to go vagabonding.  
I take up a burlap bag to fill with golden sand,  
observing that inspired expression of one seeking eternal true love, full and  
vigorous.  
I tell her:  
“Today the smell of the sea around the shoal is especially strong,  
so it seems that the Ferryman is bringing the Peach Blossom Sister  
to meet with our happy-go-lucky Fisher-woman.”  
Motioning towards Dongshi Harbor off in the distance, she says:  
“Look! There’s a boat leaping over the waves,  
chasing the tide.”  
In the afternoon the Peach Blossom Sister arrives, bringing for the Fisher-woman a  
bag of flower mushrooms from Puli,  
a sack of bamboo shoots from Gukeng, and taros from Dajia,  
all essential accoutrements of the Dragon Boat Festival.  
Last but not least, the Peach Blossom Sister pulls out a few dozen freshly fried  
oysters from Dongshi Harbor.  
Sharing them out amongst us,  
she says:  
“These were sent for the Fisher-woman by her old friend,  
the Oyster Monger in Dongshi Harbor.”  
See the azure water reflecting the clear blue sky,  
connected peaks undulating hills of golden sand  
surrounding the Bamboo House,  
composed, as it were, of the smiling bits of a jigsaw puzzle,  
the barometer of the fisherman’s happiness.

Off in the distance, the Old Fisherman casts his line into the blue sky and jade-green sea.

At dusk, as the sea continues churning out its spindrifts,  
the happy-go-lucky fishermen sing out a fishing song.

Today the fishermen are unusually happy—I know not why—as they set out to sea to challenge the waves;

During the Lesser Heat the custom is to catch fish under the moonlight.

See the south wind blowing so cool in the night;  
see the golden grains of sand collecting dew in the night,  
each grain, each drop permeated with moist energy.

Both I, the Merman, and Black Bow

spend the night at the Bamboo House of the Fisher-woman,  
where we both dream of the same image—perhaps from the past, or perhaps of the future...

2007 The magic number, 2007;

a stationmaster, 101 years old,

at Qidu 111 years ago, the long veranda with a wooden roof  
greeted the last train.

A wheel crosses the waves,

as punters and clam pickers beat the emptiness with bamboo whisks.

I, the Merman, fasten a small red flower onto the end of a long bamboo pole  
to attract a butterfly flying far off in the distance.

At that time, there was a steaming hot vapor circulating on the shoal  
and a pervasive, biting sunshine.

Then there was the self-styled mighty leader, 107 years in age,  
still daily singing out the theme song from the hand marionette play Goddess  
Dragon in the Sea of Tribulation,  
a sad tune, yet full of joy.

Off in the distance, a silvery butterfly-wing sail chases the fire-red setting sun.

I see Black Bow tightly embracing you, Kunshen,  
and giving you a deep kiss.



You happily follow Black Bow,  
as I watch your backs  
slowly disappearing into the water.  
All of a sudden, from beyond the sky there comes shining down moonlight  
refracted in some distant window;  
instantly I wake up,  
realizing that once again I dreamed that ever-recurring dream.

At the break of day the Ferryman carries away the Peach Blossom Sister,  
as all the fishermen return, following the first rays of the sun.  
I, the Merman, and Black Bow pilot a rakish boat,  
flapping against the silvery-white surface, heading toward a future dream,  
attentively listening to school after school of lovely fish—the name of which I  
know not—  
together with the water composing a symphony of joy.  
See the distant waves, splitting and reconnecting,  
fishing nets held afloat by bobbing buoys.  
Suddenly, a great wave seizes our oars,  
as a bevy of billows spins our rakish boat in the opposite direction,  
walls of water instantly crashing down,  
blocking our way.  
See the revolving waves spinning out the grain of the water,  
the formerly transparent and placid sea  
now full of bubbling foam and leaping waves.  
See the many-layered waves, like a banana-leaf fan,  
waving all about.  
Our rakish boat, like a crippled butterfly, shuttled about between the black and  
white of the waves.  
Yet, we have no fear,  
for we know that on the shoal someone is praying for us.  
Palms placed together in front of her chest, the Fisher-woman

silently brings us to mind sending powerful blessings.

In a moment, the stormy waves begin to subside,  
and after being tossed about by the current for what seemed like a year,  
we are now back on our original course.

That night the Fisher-woman tells us story after story about the shoal,  
as the wind howls outside the veranda of the Bamboo House,  
water churning about just below.

For tonight stormy waves meet a high tide;  
yet I, the Merman, and Black Bow  
again pass another happy night in the mysterious house of the Kunshen Fisher-  
woman.

The Autumn Equinox, 1937.

See the mesmerizing moonlight in the fresh air of autumn,  
the spindrift lazily reclining in the cradle of the waves,  
chasing the moonlight, gradually falling asleep.

Black Bow and I, the Merman,  
have come to this chilly sea  
in search of the fire-red dragon, stout as a bow.

Tonight all 333 fishing boats  
are out on the water with flaming torches.

As it turns out, all the residents of the shoal  
have come out to celebrate the Mid-autumn Festival<sup>7</sup>.

Clouds part up above a beaming mirror.

Piloting an extraordinary lotus boat,

I meet with all manner of lovely large fish—the name of which I know not.

The Fisher-woman has heard that tonight Kunshen, in the form of a large, beautiful  
fish,

will be coursing through the depths of the Taiwan Strait;

up to the present I have searched without finding that erstwhile dream in which  
you take on a new form.

---

7. The 15th day of the 8th month of the lunar calendar; also known as the Moon Festival.

See that edge of the shoal.

Yesterday an open-air performance space was put up;  
tonight the Ferryman and the Peach Blossom Sister sing an antiphonal love song.  
Punters and clam pickers perform Shaolin martial arts,  
the Lighthouse Keeper and the Oyster Monger perform a Taiwanese opera,  
and the mysterious Grandma of the Night puts on a marionette show,  
the story of a night 37 years ago.

Everybody gets a turn to take the stage,  
all recorded by the Itinerant Poet and the Novelist.

The rakish boat of a young fisherman traverses an extraordinary scene,  
a school of silvery fish tracing out the rays of moonlight,  
like a bevy of shooting stars streaming through the Milky Way.  
Far off on the horizon, the spindrifts compete in performing an enchanting  
butterfly dance.

See those waves and billows freely coursing through the water;  
see the tide performing its concerto.  
Black Bow knows that the Taiwan Strait  
harbors an incredible treasure chest,  
a repository of inexhaustible wealth.

Wind circling, waves flashing,  
as the young boatman follows the current,  
drawing arcs and circles in the turbulent sea.  
A rising wind    cracks appear in the mirror-bright sea,  
fragments of moonlight floating all about,  
white-capped waves slicing through the deep-blue sea.  
The young boatman heads back in, shouting out to the 333 fishing boats,  
singing the youthful, uplifting song of those seafarers, strangers to fear.  
Moonlight, cool and bright, slowly embraced by the clouds,  
the denizens of the shoal dancing with the riptide, rocking with the waves.  
333 boats

returning to shore, following some mysterious current buried in the ocean depths.  
In the performance space the last scene is underway,  
where a mythical leviathan<sup>8</sup> turns into a roc,  
bringing the Merman to tears ...

When I run into her next to the performance space on the beach,  
she tells me that she has been searching for me in the moonlight all night.  
I tell her that all the while my lotus boat was under the moonlight chasing the wind  
and following the current.

As I watch the denizens of this forsaken patch of sand in this most happy scene,  
suddenly something quite strange appears in the sky—  
innumerable bolts of lightning, silent and continuous, flash in the darkness.

Black Bow and the fishing people cry out:

“Lightning without thunder    Lightning without thunder! Tomorrow the weather  
will be excellent!

This fall the catch will surely be a big one!”

The wind slowly drops    the waves slowly calm,  
the moonlight slowly fades,

while up and down the bamboo mast attached to the veranda of the Bamboo  
House the dew condenses into pearls.

The Fisher-woman comes over  
and invites Black Bow and I into the Bamboo House  
to sketch the bright autumn moon.

See the silvery sea and the golden sand laden with moisture.

A window in the clouds reveals the subtly shifting stars of the Milky Way,  
as on layer upon layer of overlapping bamboo  
the pure dew draws in the moonlight.

The Fisher-woman once again tells us all about  
the Peach Blossom Sister and the Oyster Monger.

She says that the Peach Blossom Sister lives in the Peach Blossom Cave at Dongshi  
Harbor,

---

8. In the Zhuangzi, the name of a huge mythical fish that lives in the Northern Sea.

where she and her family have planted lots of Peach trees which blossom in the spring.

“She likes to sing and quibble with the Ferryman;  
she is the best singer in Dongshi Harbor;  
she is content with life and happy all day;  
she yearns for someone to yearn for,  
but doesn’t worry about it;  
she sings a song to accompany her dance,  
just like a fluttering pink butterfly.  
The Ferryman is quite fond of the Peach Blossom Sister;  
he’s been unsuccessfully courting her  
for twenty years now ...”

She says that the Oyster Monger lives at Budai Harbor,  
where every day she shells and sells fresh oysters.

“She enjoys piling up the shelled oysters  
into a small mountain;  
the higher the mountain, the higher her joy,  
for this is how she announces that there was once again a good catch.  
Ever diligent, she fully applies herself to her work,  
everyday reckoning the weight of all the oysters she has shelled.  
Her husband is the Lighthouse Keeper.  
Every day he returns to Budai Harbor, hitching a ride on the setting sun;  
when he gets home he warms up with a piping hot bowl of oyster noodles prepared  
by his wife, the Oyster Monger.”

Today you also make it a point to tell the story of a new friend of yours,  
that very mysterious person from Kouhu, Grandma of the Night.  
You say that at the entrance to her home there is a torch made of ice crystals.  
“The handle is made of ice crystals,  
topped with a wondrous sort of blue flame,  
looking very hot and mysterious;

it's said that that blue flame has never gone out.  
She is the only shamaness on this part of the coast—  
from Dongshi to Budai, Kouhu, and Haomeiliao.  
Whenever any of the children in these parts are out of sorts, their parents take  
them to see her.  
She carries out a shamanic ritual which brings the child's startled spirit back into  
the body;  
it's said to be highly effective.  
These sort of procedures are normally carried out late at night,  
so all the kids along the coast call her 'Grandma of the Night.'"

In the Lesser Full Grain<sup>9</sup> of 1907,  
I, the Merman, return from the vast sea to the Bamboo House.  
It's the time of the swelling tide on the seventh day following the full moon;  
a school of multicolored fish saunters in the water,  
projecting a gorgeous, surreal light onto the surface,  
as the veins of circulating sand take on the appearance of flowing gold leaf.  
Sand dunes clothed in a thin sheet of water  
change position and form in the moonlight,  
highlighting their individual beauty and shape.  
Tonight the 333 seasoned mariners of the fishing families  
indulge themselves in drifting with the tide on this great body of water.  
Each one energetically pulling the oars,  
each boat like a shuttle pushing forward against the tide.  
See the waves successively retreating,  
the snow-white spindrift spraying all about.  
The mother of the sea, graceful and restrained,  
gently stirs this watery cradle,  
so that her children—all the water spirits—  
will peacefully fall asleep in the moonlight.  
Light riding the waves, faintly glittering on the surface of the water;

---

9. The 8th of the 24 two-week periods in the Chinese lunar calendar, approximately May 21st to June 5th in the Gregorian calendar.

moist sea fog, sticky and smooth, diffuses over the shoal;  
pensive and pretty stingrays ensconced in the sand dunes.  
Off in the distance, fishing boats shuttle all about.  
Just past the dead of night an undercurrent moves in,  
as schools of flying fish glide over the moonlit surface of the water.  
The fishing families live in these elevated bamboo houses,  
on a sand dune  
completely surrounded by the Taiwan Strait.

One night during the Lesser Full Grain of 1937,  
the seventh day following the full moon,  
all the fishermen were out at sea,  
for this is a village of fishing people,  
catching fish for a living.  
It was on that night  
that there came from out of nowhere a ship, the Southern Despot,  
carrying the Little Despot.  
He charges into the Wind Pavilion,  
intending to carry off a pretty maiden  
who is making porridge in preparation for the fishermen's return.  
Just then, a 17-year-old pretty boy shows up to rescue the pretty maiden,  
engaging the Little Despot in a martial arts duel.  
On that night during the Lesser Full Grain of 1907,  
seven days after the full moon,  
the Little Conqueror slipped away like a defeated rooster,  
and the pretty maiden went back to cooking her porridge but  
the 17-year-old pretty boy lost an arm in the duel,  
in spite of which he quietly went off without revealing his injury.

I, the Merman, return to the Bamboo House from the great, misty sea.  
It was during the Lesser Full Grain of 1954,

seven days after the full moon.

I tell the Fisher-woman about this concealed event,  
telling her that the pretty maiden of that time is now Grandma of the Night in Kouhu,

and the pretty boy of that time is now the Old Fisherman  
who drifts about all day in his boat, the Wind Pavilion.

Afterwards, that pretty maiden was chosen by the people of the estuary  
to be the shamaness in charge of protecting this body of water.

All the Old Fisherman can do to assuage his broken heart  
is to pilot the lotus boat he calls the Wind Pavilion and dance with the waves.

See that golden wave of sand formed into a geometric shape,  
the azure sea and sky pulling down a broad, silvery screen.

I, the Merman, see that knowing pair of eyes of the Fisher-woman when she was a  
girl,

just as lovely now that she is old.

The Fisher-woman says that the heyday of the elevated bamboo houses is long  
gone,

and that now only a few houses  
are left on the shoal,

forlorn, used now and then as a rest stop by fishermen.

The Fisher-woman also says that even as the bamboo houses slowly disappear,  
there are still a few holdouts, old timers who continue to make the shoal their  
home,

farming clams amidst the golden sands and silvery sea—

the Old Fisherman, the punters, the clam pickers;

the Ferryman; the Peach Blossom Sister;

the Lighthouse Keeper; the Oyster Monger;

and Grandma of the Night, who lives in Kouhu, but regularly comes out to visit the  
Fisher-woman...

It's now the Lesser Full Grain of 1954,



seven days after the full moon.

I tell the Fisher-woman:

“I’ve arranged for Black Bow to come here tonight  
so that the three of us can make a plan for rebuilding the elevated bamboo houses  
on the shoal  
and rekindle all those sublime and heavenly lamps on these golden sands and silvery  
sea.”

Black Bow returns

from a severe test by fire at the mysterious Eye of the Wind,  
tonight again stepping on Kunshen’s spine.  
See the inscrutable power of the wheel of fate,  
swiftly spinning out the destiny of these golden sands and silvery sea.  
See that orb of the moon

suspended atop the mast of the forsaken Bamboo House,  
the shadow of the moon concealing the Shamaness,  
the eternal sweetheart of the Old Fisherman.

The Fisher-woman says: “Look here; each grain of golden sand  
needs our attentive care.

Look at this umbrella of sand surrounded by water;  
it needs our attention and energy.”

The Merman says: “We have always had great faith in you;  
that’s why we have returned.”

Black Bow says: “Just look at this slice of golden sand surrounded by a silvery sea;  
it really does have a way of moving people deep down inside.”

This is Black Bow,

as a boy so very fond of frolicking in these waters.

For a moment a sliver of light filters in from the east.

See the Wind Pavilion far off in the distance with its silver sail,  
roaming about on the placid sea, freely catching fish,  
perhaps sailing near to Kouhu to catch a distant glimpse of Grandma of the Night.

See that water-sky mirror clearly reflecting the sky, churning out those whirling waves,  
beguiling the Old Fisherman's sense of direction.  
Recalling those events that unfolded long ago  
on this island of golden sands,  
when the 17-year-old pretty boy  
mustered up a supernatural courage to defeat the Little Despot, captain of the Southern Despot.  
On that night, in the presence of the 17-year-old pretty maiden,  
such a heroic and mighty warrior,  
...beginning...starting...looping memory...  
returning to the primordial essence of life...  
It's all because of love  
that the Old Fisherman has never left these golden sands and silvery sea.

The sky brightens one by one, boats set out to challenge the sea,  
charging towards that boundless body of water,  
as the churning spindrift sprinkles the boats and rafts of the fishermen,  
the late autumn sea far from calm.  
See the force-9 winds of the northeast monsoon rising up against those sails.  
Fishermen rowing with all their might;  
fishermen casting nets all around;  
he who reaches the fishing ground first  
gets the biggest catch.  
See those boats tightly attached to the surface of the water,  
gliding along, embraced by the waves,  
as heavenly fragments of glittering light  
sprinkle down from a window in the clouds.  
See that cluster of clouds in the sky, most fond of joining in on the fun,  
by chance becoming the sweetheart of this body of water.  
Today all the fishing people tightly close their lips,

focusing on their work  
and silently praying to the Sea God  
for a good catch.  
Two boats team up to drag a net,  
already full of vivacious fish.  
Raft races raft,  
together chasing the setting sun.

Riding in Black Bow's boat, Evening Red, I, the Merman, say that  
there were once seven shoals in the Taiwan Strait;  
six of them have already disappeared,  
and Kunshen is the only one that remains.  
Black Bow says that due to global warming  
the ice at the North Pole is starting to melt.  
She says that the one time she left the shoal  
was in order to have a look for herself..  
In the glow of dusk,  
although Frost Descends<sup>10</sup> has already arrived,  
in these parts the temperature is still 17 degrees Celsius.  
All of a sudden, a powerful wind kicks up a force-7 whitecap,  
soaking both of us in front.  
A boat slowly pulls up to the shallow wharf,  
as wave upon wave sweeps against the flow, towards the inland sea.  
This lovely stretch of water is filled with the bamboo poles of the oyster farms.  
Riding in the Ferryman's *Boathouse*, the Peach Blossom Sister sings a song from the  
mountains.  
The Lighthouse Keeper pilots his *Time Inn*  
out to inspect the old lighthouse.  
On the surface of the sea  
fishing boats laden with happy moonlight return to port.

---

10. The 18th of the 24 two-week periods in the Chinese lunar calendar, approximately October 23rd to November 6th in the Gregorian calendar.

Now and then a white spindrift cuts along the azure surface of the pellucid water,  
moonlight filters down,  
an afterglow from the setting sun.  
See that hill on the shoal,  
that lonely windmill, painted with the image of the green bird,  
blade spinning in the westerly wind.  
Like day and night light and darkness,  
this magical world, forgotten, yet independent,  
freely being reborn life after life without end.  
Gliding over the moonlight in our rakish boat,  
we silently draw a wake  
through the profound and primal chaos.  
The Lighthouse Keeper lights up a thousand-candle-power lamp,  
meeting the lights of the fishing boats on the surface of the water.  
See those punters, those clam pickers,  
playing with the little boys of the fishing village.  
Vines made into sturdy rope,  
binding together 13 pieces of fresh green bamboo  
into a grasshopper boat  
used by the young boys to go out and learn how to fish.  
On a clear night, just before daybreak,  
all the fishermen have returned to shore;  
and gathered in the temple of the Fire God to offer a sacrifice to the Sea God.  
The Fisher-woman has already summoned the mysterious Grandma of the Night  
—the only shamaness on this part of the coast—  
to pray for blessings on behalf of the fishing people;  
to pray for a timely end of the typhoons  
now that Frost Descends has arrived;  
so that the fishing people will happily go about their business of catching fish  
without fear of wind and waves.  
In the tailwind of the sand dune

a number of faint lamps glitter,  
as all the swells are drawn into the sleeve of a westerly wind.  
The Shamaness gazes at the Wind Pavilion floating off in the distance,  
wondering why its owner has not joined in the ritual.  
I, the Merman, watch the Shamaness wipe away a tear with the corner of her dress,  
when there suddenly occurs an earthquake, six or seven on the Richter scale.

The moonlight stirs the energy in this body of water,  
reversing the direction of the tide,  
pulling the drifting Wind Pavilion back to the shoal.  
Instantly the Old Fisherman uses his fishing pole to cast a line around the moon,  
preventing his boat from being pulled back to the shoal.  
For the Old Fisherman's only joy in life is to go about in his Wind Pavilion  
and reminisce about his eternal spring at 17.  
This body of water is alive and sensitive; it understands people.  
See the surging waves bursting open on the surf,  
overhead the orb of the moon gradually wrapped in a ribbon of cloud.  
Again, the Shamaness invokes the wind to grapple with the Old Fisherman's Wind  
Pavilion.  
Every day the Shamaness goes out by herself to the beach near Kouhu Harbor,  
endlessly pacing back and forth in bare feet,  
yet never leaving a single footprint.  
Outside Kouhu Harbor,  
outside the waters of the Taiwan Strait,  
outside the beach surrounding this island of golden sand,  
is the Old Fisherman in his Wind Pavilion,  
reluctant to depart, forever anchored by his ambivalent love for this body of water.  
This body of water is alive and sensitive; it understands people.  
The optimistic and angelic Fisher-woman is always smiling;  
she quietly sheds a tear which instantly transforms into a bright pearl; it is I, the  
Merman.

The sky opens into brightness the tide recedes,  
this island of golden sand a living slice of glory.  
A village, a world unto itself,  
peopled by fishing people living in elevated bamboo houses,  
fishermen daily setting out to challenge the sea,  
while the women and children diligently catch clams and crabs.  
Moist air companion to the thick fog,  
immanent smell of the sea.  
See that red orb of the sun, tightly adhering to the east,  
observed by the moon lingering on the western horizon.  
Today the azure sea meets the cyan sky,  
white clouds sporting with the living green water.  
On this body of water, day in and day out, the fishermen chase the waves and  
pursue the setting sun,  
sunup to sundown.  
Waisanding a world apart,  
concealed in the Taiwan Strait.  
This is where my spirit guides me on a dream voyage;  
this place is the true embodiment of the Kunshen Maiden.

The wind whips up the waves,  
boats and rafts land in a vast and virtual sky,  
as a thunderstorm smuggles in a waterspout to agitate the water all around.  
In this world of water and sand, today the beach of golden sand remains unseen.  
See those sails being rolled up inside a curtain of water;  
see those ink-colored clouds painting magic talismans in the black sky.  
The violet artillery of heaven a fierce imprecation,  
the swelling tide inundates the shoal.  
Amongst the 333 fishing families there are 19 unsinkable fast boats,  
now speeding out, dashing against the billows,  
oars spinning like flywheels, sending up successive slip streams,

etching out a new channel amongst the churning waves.  
The misty fog has already covered the entire shoal.  
See the long waves surging up into flying waterfalls,  
as raging billows leap up into strange peaks.  
The 19 unsinkable boats  
tumble through the tempest  
to rescue the fishermen who failed to return to shore in time.  
Off on the distant coast,  
in Dongshi, Budai, Kouhu, Haomeiliao,  
in every family the children pray out loud.  
A sky so dark,  
a wind so fierce;  
Daddy's gone fishing,  
but hasn't yet returned.

Crossing  
the rolling sea,  
a vast fog shrouds the palpitating water.  
The shoal now submerged,  
only the elevated bamboo houses remain,  
propped up on their thin legs.  
Windsurfing clouds, thin as paper umbrellas,  
fluttering in the howling wind,  
as if to summon the fishermen still at sea.  
See those boats and rafts lost at sea,  
in a moment of carelessness fallen into the mysterious and frightful undercurrent,  
instantly carried off;  
no way out.  
Remembering how last night the Sea God informed the fishing people in a dream  
that the mysterious and frightful undercurrent is coming to swallow all their boats.  
Who could not have known

that the young Shamaness advised a closure of the all the harbors in Dongshi,  
Budai, Kouhu, and Haomeiliao?

Why would some fishermen not heed the warning?

The Fisher-woman calls in the Old Fisherman with the Wind Pavilion,

the Ferryman with the *Boathouse*,

the Lighthouse Keeper with *Time Inn*,

Black Bow with Evening Red,

and myself, the Merman, to lead the 333 fishing families

with those 19 unsinkable boats

in mounting a search and rescue mission on this vast and turbulent body of water..

It's said that on that night the 19 unsinkable boats

managed to rescue 111 boats and rafts,

but it's also said that several dozen have never returned to the shoal.

The typhoon has already gone out to sea;

yet, in front of the houses around the harbor,

quite a few children continue praying out loud.

A sky so dark,

a wind so fierce;

Daddy's gone fishing,

but hasn't yet returned...

Today the Shamaness has come from Kouhu,

and a line of children is waiting for her to usher their spirits back into their bodies.

See the elevated bamboo houses,

windsurfing clouds no longer in front,

wind socks no longer in back,

as if they have lost both head and tail;

the multilayered, soaring corridor of sand is all that remains.

The mood of the sea gradually calms.

See those snow-capped waves galloping off into the distance,

fading away like an abstract ink-wash painting.



The waves again fall in line and follow the flow of the tide.  
Those off-course waters  
have gone for shelter in the hills and lakes of the coastal region.  
The fishing people on the shoal spend several days repairing their bamboo houses.  
At daybreak, several colored clouds appear in the sky;  
today the wind wheel spins out an arc of 109.5 degrees.  
The wind flag atop the mast of the Bamboo House  
spins around 3.28767123 times,  
and then does the same  
over and over,  
from dusk till dawn.

It was at that time that the 17-year-old pretty boy  
—now Black Bow— told me that she would again sail afar.  
See her eyes full of limitless affection,  
full of passionate tears,  
filling me with adoration and attachment.  
She says that this time she wants to search the seas and oceans  
for the Lanhai and that large and lovely roving whale.  
I listen with bated breath,  
her adolescent kiss of that day still imprinted on my lips.  
I wrap my hands around her waist,  
she hugs me even tighter.  
Separation is even sadder  
in this unsteady weather just after a typhoon.  
I ask if she's told the Fisher-woman;  
she says she has only told me.  
All we can do is agree to meet exactly three years from this afternoon,  
here on these golden sands and silvery sea, and together gaze upon the setting sun.  
Thereupon, she passionately kisses me goodbye.  
I ask the Fisher-woman to quickly light a lamp to honor the Big Dipper,

to beseech the Water God to protect Evening Red.  
Suddenly, a boat flies up as fast as an arrow,  
cutting through wave after wave, as if in a dream.  
As it turns out, Black Bow has already fastened her foot rope  
and hoisted up a skysail into the silvery moonlight.  
Chasing the wind, covering a great distance in a flash, vanished without a trace.  
I, the Merman, have not been able to ascertain the volume of the sea,  
just knowing that it is vast, limitless...  
The Fisher-woman comes down from the Bamboo House to see me  
and affectionately tells me:  
“The tide comes in and goes out goes out and comes in,  
that’s what makes this sea so beautiful.  
It’s only three days since the typhoon;  
see that cloud still hanging on the horizon,  
see that orb of the setting sun under the fisherman’s foot.  
Tonight all the boats have again set out to sea,  
leaving behind the moon as the shoal’s lone sentinel.”  
Just then, off in the distance, level with the water,  
there appears a fleeting red light.  
The Fisher-woman whispers in my ear:  
“Stop thinking, stop missing, stop remembering in vain.  
Look at that light filtering through the sky,  
informing the fishing people of the shoal  
that another typhoon is on the way;  
that’s why they’ve all hurried out to sea...”  
  
“He’s back, He’s back; the Merman is back!”  
Every year on the Eight Royal Days<sup>11</sup>,  
riding the moonlight, the Merman always returns to this slice of golden sands and  
silvery sea.  
Every time he returns to these waters

---

11. The two equinoxes, two solstices, and the four intermediate dates marking the first day of each of the four seasons (Birth of Spring, etc.).

the Fisher-woman and Black Bow hear a mysterious rowing sound.  
Some say that the Merman is the sweetheart of the Fisher-woman;  
others say that the Merman is dear to Black Bow.  
See the Ferryman, forever in love with the Peach Blossom Sister;  
see the Lighthouse Keeper, forever secretly in love with the Oyster Monger.  
Here, love is this simple;  
here, affection is this reserved.  
See those golden sand dunes, heaped up by the wind;  
see those golden sand dunes, rolled up by the waves;  
see that body of water off in the distance.  
Sometimes the wind pulls the waves long; at other times it pushes them high.  
Sometimes the wind is in an unsteady mood; at other times it lightly strokes the  
cheeks of the Fisher-woman.  
Sometimes the wind repeatedly pats our palms, yours, mine, and hers;  
at other times the wind blows the fisherman's boats and oars far out to sea where  
they cast their nets;  
at other times it prevents the fishermen from returning to shore.

Here the wind is in charge,  
water and waves at its command;  
here the wind is the boss,  
sea and clouds follow its mood.  
Here the wind is so merciless  
that not a single grain of sand dares to step out of line.  
“Wind, oh Wind.”  
Every new and full moon, the Fisher-woman entreats the Water God  
to pacify the wind,  
so that the fishermen can safely return to harbor.  
“Wind, oh Wind.  
please don't be so intense;  
for tonight the fishermen are still far out at sea.

Wind, oh Wind,  
please relax a bit,  
even though I, the Merman, have not yet found for you the Wind-settling Pearl.  
Wind, oh Wind..."

In response to the entreaty of the Fisher-woman,  
the wind gradually calms.

"The Merman is back! The Merman is back,"  
cry out the Fisher-woman and Black Bow, as they come running over from the  
shoals

to help me tie down the boat.

Together, we step onto the golden sands and silvery sea,  
the elevated Bamboo House embraced by sun and air.

See the sandy beach bathed in arching waves,  
the Kunshen Maiden's lovely waist;  
waves of light rippling off into the distance,  
the slanting rays of the setting sun affectionately stroking this living body of water.  
Alone in the Wind Pavilion, the Old Fisherman  
meanders in the afterglow of the setting sun.

From the distant surface of the water,  
the elevated bamboo houses appear to be decked out with black sari sails.

The Old Fisherman espies a flame-red dragon, a man stout as a bow.

Oh the Old Fisherman knows that on the Eight Royal Days

I, the Merman, return.

Over yonder, the Lighthouse Keeper ties down *Time Inn*  
and alights on the shoal.

Wah he has also brought the Oyster Monger.

Along with the Fisher-woman and Black Bow, I wave to the Oyster Monger,  
who has brought ten catties of freshly shelled oysters for the Fisher-woman.

The Oyster Monger tells us:

"The oysters here are formed from the combination of a grain of sand and the

essence of the water;  
after gestating inside,  
the inner impression grows into a type of sacred species,  
God's gift to the seafarers."

See that great body of water crisscrossed by the fishing boats,  
off in the distance the Ferryman about to guide the *Boathouse* back to shore.

See the Peach Blossom Sister, raising half a skirt,  
bare legs wading through the shallows.

The Fisher-woman calls out and waves to the Peach Blossom Sister;  
off in the distance, near the other shore, the Old Fisherman in the Wind Pavilion  
drifts about in a sleepy reverie, uncharted and vast.

See that eye of dusk, about to retire to the ocean floor,  
as the Old Fisherman is jarred awake by a howling wind;  
see that rosy reflection spreading over the water, kicking up 19 huge waves.

Out from Kouhu comes a flotilla flying a five-colored flag,  
19 in all, skimming over the water,  
bringing the beautiful Shamaness,  
retinue in tow, to these golden sands and silvery sea to bring a message to the  
Fisher-woman.

Grandma of the Night, that beautiful shamaness, says:

"For one week, from the 17th to the 23rd,  
every night you must pay homage to the Big Dipper;  
in this way you will gain the protection of the Sea God.

By supplicating the Big Dipper every night  
with complete sincerity,  
when the fishermen on this shoal go out to sea,  
they will be assured of a safe return."

Having made her announcement, Grandma of the Night, that beautiful shamaness,  
casts a knowing smile in my direction,  
says goodbye to the Fisher-woman, and leaves with a roar.

Off in the distance, near the other shore, aboard the Wind Pavilion the Old Fisherman is already drunk.

See that drunken face, redder than the setting sun.

The embodiment of the beautiful Kunshen,  
a magical protective umbrella, God's gift to the fishing people along the coast.  
That beautiful Kunshen, a work of nature wrought in a dream,  
a solid protective barrier for the fishing people along the coast.  
Summer has arrived at the break of day the Fisher-woman goes clamming in the sand flats,  
taking a midday rest in the elevated Bamboo House, cooled by the south wind.  
See those lighthouses, one dilapidated, one old, one new,  
standing equidistant, facing each other from afar,  
sharing with one another memorable events of the past.  
Black Bow, resting on the window of Evening Red,  
listens attentively to a cipher blown in on a gentle wind.  
Dusk, a rising tide; while working in the shoals  
the Fisher-woman discovers that today the twilight glow is particularly strange and bright.  
Hear the old lighthouse exhorting the new one:  
"Tonight you have to be especially careful;  
for in this sort of weather there may well be a summer typhoon."  
The new lighthouse looks at the dilapidated one and concernedly says:  
"What will you do;  
you're all worn out,  
and I'm afraid that you may not be able to stand up to another typhoon."  
The dilapidated lighthouse replies:  
"Don't you remember that terrible storm that came in when you were first put up?  
I stood up to that one, so what's there to worry about now?"  
Just then, a seagull flying past  
lands on top of the old lighthouse;

a moment later, a migratory bird flies in  
and perches on the peak of the new lighthouse;  
before long, a red-crested crane from the far south  
arrives and boldly perches right on the nose of the dilapidated lighthouse.  
All of these amusing goings on are seen by the Fisher-woman with her own eyes,  
and personally heard by Black Bow.  
Before long, I, the Merman, along with the Peach Blossom Sister and the Ferryman  
in his *Boathouse*,  
return to the shoal to see Black Bow and the Fisher-woman.  
Suddenly, the seagull, the migratory bird, and the red-crested crane all fly away.  
The Ferryman loudly calls out:  
“All you fishing people in the elevated bamboo houses get ready; a typhoon is on  
the way!”  
Listen to the muted sound of the three equidistant lighthouses—old, dilapidated,  
and new—gabbling away..

Gales spinning on the vast expanse of water,  
a bird speeding through the sky,  
as a naked clay figurine dances a spirited dance amidst the surf.  
The optic fibers of the sun plunge deep down into the dark sea,  
a magical bridge on the peaks of the waves tosses and tumbles.  
A boat falters; I, the Merman, prop it up on my shoulder.  
Black Bow wants to set up a blog dedicated to the traditional fisherman’s hut.  
See the beads of water splashing on the beach,  
a transparent water spirit continuously sweeping over the yellow and golden sand;  
see the rose-tinged sunset filling the celestial space,  
as a single phoenix feather of magical color floats amongst the white clouds.  
In 1904, in this most happy of places on Earth,  
there was born a silversmith of exceptional ability,  
who fashioned a necklace of pure silver with a grape motif and gave it to his  
sweetheart;

nowadays it adorns the chest of Black Bow,  
who has a varied collection of silver jewelry,  
including ornaments in the shape of cicada wings, butterfly wings, and dragonfly  
wings the color of light.

Dusk; a red glare on the western horizon  
emits a blue light.

See the setting orb of the sun, inscribing its signature on the vast purple canvas of  
the evening sky.

On the summit of the tall mast rests a glittering pearl of water,  
containing a hundred thousand points of light,  
taking a snapshot of the grand finale of the declining sun.

See that Black Bow, tightly embracing the pillar supporting the sky,  
climbing upwards from the Wind Porch to a sun-drenched window.

Here there is no moisture-laden mist, only the diffuse ocean fog of spring;  
here there are no unusual or rare flying insects,  
only the odd butterfly migrating south;

here there are no green birds fond of singing in the spring,  
only the occasional flock of migratory birds stopping for a rest on their way south.  
This water is alive;  
this water has intelligence;  
the people here are righteous and humane.

Black Bow wants to set up a blog dedicated to the traditional fisherman's hut,  
dreaming that the ocean is filled with reminiscences of those unique bamboo  
homes.

Today Black Bow visits a tiny harbor on the coast.

The Oyster Monger has already greeted her next-door neighbors,  
come to the kitchen of the Peach Blossom Sister to help with the cooking.

The Peach Blossom Sister says that what people remember the most  
are those years of hardship, when people were always ready to help each other out;



just simple fishing people living on a shoal,  
but with such honesty and sincerity.  
See the elevated bamboo houses made of moso bamboo brought from Zhushan,  
the only shelter of the fishing people of old;  
see the beautiful Kunshen, baptized daily in these waters.  
Dusk comes, morning goes, leaving nary a trace;  
the tide rises, the tide recedes, yet no memory remains.  
Here the waves and wind are always rehearsing,  
loudly calling out to one another in an antiphonal style;  
here the fisherman's voices are swallowed up by the waves.  
See the Fisher-woman standing up a tall bamboo pole,  
topped with seven paint buckets of different color,  
for summoning those far away.

See the flying snow dancing in this caldron of water;  
see the swelling waves drawing arcs in this caldron of water;  
see the fragrant south wind lightly blowing in the distance.  
High in the firmament, heavenly drums successively thunder out to each other,  
as if entreating the Sea God to transform the misty fog  
into a scene surging with summer zeal.  
The Fisher-woman, that beautiful manifestation of the Kunshen Maiden,  
born and raised in the elevated Bamboo House amidst the golden sands and silvery  
sea.  
The Fisher-woman, that beautiful manifestation of the Kunshen Maiden,  
has not once left this shoal of golden sands amidst the silvery sea,  
for you love this body of water, you adore this strip of sand;  
for you love the moonrise here, you adore the setting sun.  
For you, it's just that simple,  
your life is just that sincere.  
As for the grand desires of ordinary folk, you harbor none;  
imbued with optimism and an all-embracing compassion,

you take joy in entreating the Sea God  
to guide the seafarers safely back to shore.

The beautiful Kunshen Maiden,  
an off-shore shoal subtly shifting in the vast sea.  
See those rafts in twos and threes,  
beyond eyeshot of shore, chasing the wind, wrestling the waves;  
see that lonely corner of the vast sea,  
that forsaken wharf of fools,  
rarely visited by boat or raft,  
forgotten by all but the morning and evening tide,  
racing along as usual, day and night.  
Here the Strait has no natural order;  
only countless waves and billows, meeting, embracing, separating.  
See the glittering night sky, putting up a ladder to the Milky Way,  
directly flowing down to this miraculous body of azure-blue water;  
see that elevated Bamboo House,  
glittering stars filling the cloud-patched sky,  
grains of golden sand in packs and bands transform into waves in the silvery sea.  
See the Wind Porch, first to receive the first rays of the sun.  
A mist flies over the off-shore shoals,  
hills of sand and fog,  
foam and bubbles chasing each other on the crest of a wave,  
suddenly disappearing into that eternal moment.  
See who can be the first to store up the eternity of the moment,  
drawing in the first rays of dawn,  
turning into the blazing orb of the sun.

Early in the morning, the Fisher-woman  
places her ten toes where the tide embraces the golden sand,  
the transparent blue dew and moisture-laden fog

soaking her entire dress;  
neither dwelling on the past, nor anxious about the future.  
Dwelling fully in the present moment,  
the Fisher-woman sees each and every bubble which flies up out of the great sea,  
orderly and clear.  
The Fisher-woman places her ten toes where the tide embraces the golden sand,  
turning around to see  
thousands of toes at work on the sand flats,  
placing thousands of toe prints in the sand.  
Suddenly, a white wave hugs a golden swell,  
erasing all the footprints of the fishing people;  
in the great drizzle the Fisher-woman's eternal memory in the present moment is  
all that remains.

See those boats on the water, oars spinning like flaming wheels,  
sails spreading all over the vast sea,  
etching channels ever deeper.  
Who says a boat leaves no track on the water?  
See that water, that boat swaying in the rolling waves,  
the wise *yu*<sup>12</sup> bird steadily perched atop the mast;  
see the raft startling the spindrift dancing off to one side.  
In the deepest depths of the sea there is a beautiful fish—the name of which I  
know not;  
it freely frolics in the depths,  
without the slightest fear.  
See that tiny island of sand surrounded by the boundless sea.  
A wind kicks up,  
instantly blowing in hundreds of boats and rafts casting nets into the water.  
See that tiny hill of sand,  
with three lighthouses—one old, one dilapidated, one new—  
listening attentively to the cipher of the wind, the song of the sea.

---

12. A large, mythical sea-bird which flies high and floats on the breeze. Its image is painted on the bows of junks.

Today the Fisher-woman decides to walk from the old lighthouse to the dilapidated one,  
and then on to the new lighthouse, making an equidistant circuit.  
See the fishing people, not gone out to sea, scouring the sand flats for clams,  
faces wrinkled by sandstorms recording the lingering of time;  
the fishing people here are simple, honest, and happy,  
natural, upright, and strong.

Since childhood, Black Bow has had the water and sand as friends,  
the wind and the clouds as companions;  
every summer afternoon  
lying on the navel of the beautiful Kunshen,  
listening to that mysterious dialogue between Kunshen and the tide.  
Off in the distance, the Old Fisherman's Wind Pavilion slides down a wave,  
following the flow;  
off in the distance, the Ferryman's *Boathouse* scurries up a billow.  
See the fragrant south wind lightly rocking this great caldron of water,  
as hundreds of lotus-leaf boats sport with the fish in the water;  
see the gusts of wind stirring this great caldron of water,  
as hundreds of rafts woven of reeds  
bob and drift about in the white spindrift...

• **Kunshen's Secret**

Nobody knows how 111 years ago  
the beautiful Kunshen rose up from the Taiwan Strait;  
or how 111 years later she sank back into the Strait by nearly one third;  
the beautiful Kunshen is more than half submerged in the water.  
On the Autumn Equinox of 1974,  
Black Bow's family was celebrating the birth of its third generation.  
At that time, I, the Merman,  
hurried back from the distant Pacific Ocean.

That day the sunset on the shoal was breathtakingly beautiful,  
as a fisherman standing on a sand dune flew a kite.  
The same Southern Despot which came some decades earlier  
has been back to this remote coast—I know not when.  
See the golden sand flowing on Kunshen's back, slowly disappearing,  
an hourglass, as it were, exclusive to the waters of Taiwan;  
see the spectrum of dusk,  
time like so many spindrifts etched out by the fishing boats,  
repeatedly erased, only to be re-etched,  
repeatedly etched, only to be discarded.  
See the watery path cut out by so many bamboo rafts,  
the undercurrent increasingly deep.  
As it turns out, the sand thieves have formed an alliance with a group of benighted  
businessmen  
to carry off this bright golden sand,  
sinking, sinking, ever sinking down.  
See the grim hand of profit stretching out from the Southern Despot,  
ravaging the beautiful Kunshen.

The Fisher-woman is supplicating the gods,  
as is her custom on the first and fifteenth days of the lunar month.  
Today she is entreating the Sea God and the Five Royal Lords<sup>13</sup>  
to drive away the benighted businessmen and the sand thieves.  
Once a beautiful stretch of golden sand and silvery sea,  
at present, all that remains on the sand bar are a few families and a few traditional  
fisherman's huts,  
as well as the Fisher-woman, who will never leave this shoal.  
We convene a meeting  
to discuss creating a blog dedicated to the restoration of Kunshen,  
a sort of virtual fishing village.  
On that night, we gather at the home of Black Bow,

---

13. Also known as the Five Kings, this group of deities is extremely popular in Taiwan; their main function is to prevent and expel disease and plague.

whose family is celebrating the birth of Black Bow's grandchild.  
The mysterious Grandmother of the Night has come from Kouhu;  
the Lighthouse Keeper and the Oyster Monger have come from Budai;  
the Ferryman and the Peach Blossom Sister have come from Dongshi;  
an assortment of roving seamen, clam pickers, and punters from along the coast  
have come,  
as have the Old Fisherman in his Wind Pavilion.  
Black Bow says:  
"Once there were 333 fishing families here;  
it was like a small village;  
at present there only remain a few families and a few fisherman's huts.  
How, then, can we go about creating a blog dedicated to the restoration of  
Kunshen,  
a virtual fishing village for the Fisher-woman?

On the fifth day following the Spring Equinox Black Bow's grandchild is born;  
I, the Merman, tell the newborn baby a story..  
Out on the vast ocean a solitary boat follows a wise yi bird,  
come south from the North Pole.  
See that series of waves;  
see the tide drawing its bow.  
Pulling the bow   arranging the waves;  
arranging the waves   pulling the bow.  
In this mysterious body of water  
there has always been a mysterious scent.  
In these fragrant waters ships never get grounded;  
boats and rafts leisurely float about,  
never dropping anchor.  
In these unfathomable waters, gentle and smooth, empty, yet full of life,  
the waves and tide coincide,  
the waves and billows interpenetrate...

I, the Merman, continue telling a story to the newborn baby..  
The surf is perspiration born of the sea's passion;  
the evening and morning tides are the sea's circulatory system.  
In these mysterious, unfathomable fragrant waters,  
the thunder and lightning summon the water spirits, away from home;  
the white clouds in the blue sky  
guide back the rain drops roving about.  
Every summer the fragrant south wind comes to soothe this fine body of water  
in a sort of symbiotic relationship;  
myriads of beautiful fish—the name of which I know not—as numerous as the  
grains of sand in the Ganges,  
happily saunter about in this benevolent body of water.

I, the Merman, continue telling a story to the newborn baby, Black Bow's third  
generation.  
See those white lotuses bursting open on the crests of the waves;  
see that fluttering white butterfly, lightly trifling with the tide;  
see the surging waves washing over the beautiful Kunshen,  
the beautiful Kunshen Maiden, our eternal lover.  
Today the newborn baby will also meet this primordial love song;  
the beautiful Kunshen Maiden, a never-ending first love.  
See the long, long wave, curving, curving, curving,  
wrapping itself around Kunshen, reluctant to let go;  
see those waves in array, drawing bow after bow after arching bow,  
breaking into foam,  
smoothly transforming into piece, after piece, after piece  
of watery garment, forever clothing Kunshen.  
See that vault of heaven, a bright and effulgent patch of pristine blue;  
see that setting sun, embracing a patch of flaming red,  
the sea a sheet of transparent blue,  
occasionally there floats in from afar a white...

I, the Merman, continue telling a story to the newborn baby..  
It's said that it was in 1887 that the beautiful Kunshen Maiden  
flew down from the primeval northern seas to these golden sands.  
At that time, there were still many lofty sand dunes;  
now leveled, all that remains  
are the lines continually etched by the wind and water.  
A newborn baby, Black Bow's third generation;  
when she grows up she will preside over the shoal's revival.  
This extraordinary off-shore shoal has a mission——  
to provide the beautiful Kunshen Maiden  
with a place to settle down.



## Chapter II

### The Story of the Fisher-woman

I, the Merman, lay out a golden cord on the back of the beautiful Kunshen Maiden, arresting the flow of the water-borne sand into the shape of an umbrella.

Over the distant sea surrounding the fairy isle of Penhai<sup>14</sup>,  
over the Taiwan Strait, there arises a beautiful floral parasol.

In 1901, off the west coast of Formosa,  
there appeared three shoals,  
soon to be discovered by the colonial authorities.

In 1911 began the ravaging of this beautiful island of sand.

It's said that right up until 1994 there were those who didn't recognize you,  
who had no idea that every grain of sand on this roving island  
tells a story;

that every grain of sand moves about and comes to rest in accordance with the  
prevailing conditions.

You, the beautiful Kunshen Maiden, and I, the Merman,  
have put up a protective umbrella to block the wind and subdue the waves,  
for the benefit of those living along the west coast,  
those who make a living on the sea.

Who could have imagined that in 1974 ethically challenged businessmen  
would again come to this part of the coast  
to fleece these singing golden sands.

See that beautiful Kunshen, subtly shifting in the mysterious spectrum;  
listen to that thunder, emerging from that heavy, black, electric bow, shaking the  
heavens;

see those waves and billows, curving in from the Taiwan Strait, dancing out a  
rhythm.

I observe your silhouetted back, oh lovely Kunshen Maiden,  
always a moving sight.

---

14. A fabled fairy isle in the Bohai Sea.

See Black Bow piloting that open-air Evening Red,  
spinning the wheel in half circles, patrolling all over the sea,  
occasionally catching sight of this sea of golden sand.  
These days, on this vast, resplendent sea,  
all that remains is the solitary Bamboo House, elevated above the water.

Tonight a raft anchors on the shoal,  
bringing Grandma of the Night, that mysterious shamaness from Hukou,  
come to visit the Fisher-woman,  
that paragon of simplicity, optimism, and happiness.  
Under the moonlight, the lovely Kunshen carries on her back the merciless  
hourglass,  
measuring off the time, inch by inch;  
not a single footprint does it retain.  
See that wind, blowing faster than people can leave a footprint in mud, water, or  
sand;  
Black Bow, reluctant to part from that distant expression in her eyes.  
See the sky in that vast slice of water;  
presently this unique ocean house has for companionship only a few tall poles;  
see that Grandma of the Night, walking barefoot amongst the water and sand,  
climbing the ladder into the elevated Bamboo House.  
At just that moment, the Fisher-woman pulls out a five-colored flag  
and attaches it to the upper right side of the entrance.  
The lovely Fisher-woman tells Black Bow  
that I, the Merman, will be coming to spend the night.  
See the wind flag waving in the doorway,  
worn-out, yet presenting quite a sight in the brilliant moonlight.

Tonight the sea blows up force-7 gales,  
waves and billows battling, clapping, singing, dancing.  
I, the Merman, glad at heart, slowly rise up from the shallows,

arrived from the ocean depths,  
come here from the northern seas,  
in search of the Wind-settling Pearl—  
already 111 years.

The lovely Kunshen Maiden

has also come from the northern seas, traversing a million nautical miles past great  
and beautiful fish—the names of which I know not—  
freely sauntering here for thousands of years,  
finally transforming into her present form as Kunshen.

You, Black Bow, and I have a pact

to meet on these golden sands and silvery sea on the Eight Royal Days.

See that Black Bow, piloting the open-air Evening Red,

spinning the wheel in half circles,

painting that canvas of living sea,

silently reeling in the waves imbued with golden starlight and the silvery light of  
the moon.

On that night I, the Merman, had a dream;

I dreamed that you, the Fisher-woman, a manifestation of the lovely Kunshen  
Maiden,

transformed into a roc and flew up to the highest heavens.

My heart and mind besotted   perplexed   confused;

due to the force of karma

the universe continues to revolve.

My heart and mind besotted   perplexed   confused;

due to attachment to the things of the world

expectant eyes gaze out over these waters vast and vague.

My heart and mind besotted   perplexed   confused;

due to universal love for all beings

there's no abandoning this shoal and its forsaken people,

there's no abandoning the ancestral home of the fishing people.

“The south wind rises a wave swells up, following the tide;  
water rushes on a billow bounds forth, following the waves.  
On this beautiful shoal all the sand has a song;  
slowly transforming Kunshen, a prone hourglass,  
chasing time, subtly shifting from north to south.  
See that pendulum perpetually swaying  
in the upper reaches of the Milky Way,  
ever knocking on the void,  
continuously producing those winds, empty yet real.  
The wind rises clouds come, embracing the fog;  
a misty vapor covers the shoal,  
every grain of sand singing out.”

I, the Merman, dream of the lovely Fisher-woman,  
flying up as a great roc, entering the northern sea, transforming into the lovely  
Kunshen,  
then leisurely returning here, swimming 84,000 li,<sup>15</sup>  
then becoming the lovely Fisher-woman on this shoal of golden sand.  
I, the Merman, long ago made a promise  
to always take good care of you.

#### • **Springtime on the Shoal**

Waisanding, that sandy islet off the western coast of Taiwan,  
a gift from the chief deity of the sea, a natural protective barrier.  
She is the embodiment of the lovely Kunshen Maiden,  
come to protect the fishing people from the force of the waves, billows, and swells.  
During the rainy season of 1951  
I, the Merman, began my great undertaking.  
Bidding farewell to the Lanhai,  
I returned to these golden sands and silvery sea spread with moonlight.  
At that time, on the lee side of the dunes and sand flats,

---

15.A traditional measure of distance, approximately 1/5 or 1/3 of a mile.

there was still some vegetation.

Day and night, the fishing people diligently collect clams.

The elevated Bamboo House has a set of irregular-shaped windows,  
together forming the Wind Porch.

At that time a man stout as a bow

borrowed a vacant womb and the flaming red dragon was born in the midst of that  
rainy season...

The Key to Crossing the Sea of Sorrow

The memory card of the past

is unable to restore that eternal reality;

what's always missing is that unassuming friendliness;

what's always lacking is that sort of love and affection that gets engraved on your  
bones.

See that moon, waxing and waning over the course of 29.53 days.

My beloved lovely Kunshen Maiden,

gradually transformed into an element of the natural world.

I remember that some years ago you told me:

"It is because something is impermanent that it is valuable."

These days, your only concern is to pursue the monsoon and feisty waves of the  
Taiwan Strait,

subtly shifting about in this vast expanse of water.

See that lovely Kunshen Maiden,

the Fisher-woman that great soul, forever guarding this slice of golden sand and  
silvery sea;

the Fisher-woman as beautiful as a leaping ray of spirited light.

Like a crane emerged from its silver cage, turning around and looking,  
you are my eternal love.

From the appearance of your body I recognize sparseness and purity;

no matter if it's 30 years past or 30 years hence,

you are always my eternally green Lanhai.

See time passing so quickly,  
empty as bubbles  
churned up by the swirling waves.  
This shoal, formed by the shifting sand over the course of a thousand years,  
a magical hourglass made by heaven  
and placed in the Taiwan Strait for the benefit of the people of Formosa.  
See that sandy islet with that long, arching veranda of woven bamboo,  
day and night portraying moods of two different types.  
See that rain falling on the thatched roof of the elevated Bamboo House,  
pitter patter without end...  
Here the spring rains are like crowded a street fair;  
the more the merrier.  
Sometimes in the spring everything is shrouded in a thick fog;  
at other times a heavy mist comes sweeping up from the sea,  
so thick that in the early morning the Fisher-woman can't even see her hand  
stretched out in front of her face.  
In the spring, the Fisher-woman is fond of looking out  
into the vast expanse, her sharp, rotating eyes  
fixed on that mysterious expanse of water and sky, deep and quiet.  
The Fisher-woman always uses her virgin eyes  
to observe the many mysterious things in these waters,  
endlessly wandering about.

Today the Fisher-woman again saw that huge, beautiful fish—the name of which I  
know not—  
having leisurely swum here from the northern seas.  
Tonight the Peach Blossom Sister asks the Ferryman to convey a message to the  
Fisher-woman:  
“At dusk a fishing boat from some distant place is going to arrive at the Dongshi  
harbor;  
so tonight Black Bow

won't return to the elevated Bamboo House!"

Early the next morning,

I see Black Bow piloting Evening Red,

bringing the Peach Blossom Sister back to the shoal amidst the silvery sea.

They rush up to the Bamboo House and tell the Fisher-woman:

"That young boatman from the Lanhai who once spent the night in the Bamboo House

while passing through these golden sands and silvery sea

has sent some ambergris for you;

he's asked one of the mariners on that fishing boat that arrived last night to give it to you!"

Excitedly placing the ambergris on the altar of the Sea God,

the Fisher-woman says,

"Who would have thought that that affable young boatman would have remembered me!"

Springtime on the shoal,

the wind blows in all directions,

mist throughout.

See the distant waves expanding their bandwidth;

see the close up surf, bursting forth like bamboo shoots after a spring rain.

In an instant the rain stops above, clouds break up,

sky clears.

See that sheet of water, restored to a deep transparent blue,

the happy punters punting along, singing a song of joy,

delighted clam pickers gracefully dancing with their skiffs.

Off in the distance a sky-driven sail

raises up in a square patchwork of flowers,

hoping to catch that widely arching screen on the horizon filled with rosy hues,

as a raft frolics in the trough of a wave.

See the Old Fisherman piloting his Wind Pavilion over the billowing crest of a

wave.

The Lighthouse Keeper gives the Fisher-woman an ancient oak barrel he has found  
in the surf,  
no spirits inside.

The Ferryman has brought a great length of rope,  
intending to shore up the Fisher-woman's elevated Bamboo House.  
For as soon as summer arrives,  
so will the typhoons,  
and I, the Merman, will again bid adieu to this shoal amidst the silvery sea.

The Fisher-woman gives me an old, well-worn radio,  
saying that she wants me to listen for news from back home.

The Fisher-woman says that on the first and fifteenth of every month, she always  
entreats the chief Sea God  
to help me, the Merman, safely return.

I tell her:

"Mermans live in the water;  
please don't worry about me;  
every year on the Eight Royal Days I shall surely return to see you."



## Chapter III

### Meeting in the First Month of 1947

“All aboard; all aboard!”

On the fifth day of the first month of 1947,

an auspicious day to begin a new undertaking,

full of joy, the fishermen of the shoal set out to sea.

At 5:30 in the morning, on the sixth of February, 1927,

the lovely Kunshen Maiden had a dream

in which a *qilin*<sup>16</sup> turns into a *hai*<sup>17</sup>

with two heads, six torsos,

and 26,660 *xun*<sup>18</sup> in length;

to take 500,109,800 steps, the *hai* needs to spend 73 years.

One time in the early morning there was a pale nebula revolving in the sky above the shoal,

and on the peak of the Bamboo House's thatched roof

a fiery-red wheel slowly rose up;

all of the fishermen had already gone out to sea,

and in an instant a rarely seen, thick, heavy fog rose up and enveloped the lovely shoal, enveloping the elevated Bamboo House on all sides...

Last night, as the thick fog was in concourse with the mist-shrouded new moon,

I came riding in on the fog to see you.

I the merman you the lovely Kunshen Maiden;

I am your ocean you are my thousand waterways.

Having arrived I recline on your newly woven lounge chair,

permeated with the smell of your body.

I watch you light up two tiny lamps, the seedlike flame burning bright;

---

16. A mythical creature known throughout various East Asian cultures, said to appear with the imminent arrival or passing of a wise sage or an illustrious ruler. Sometimes misleadingly called the "Chinese unicorn."

17. A mythical animal akin to the *nian*, the legendary beast associated with the origins of the Chinese New Year festival.

18. A traditional unit of measure, approximately 19.5 kilometers.

next to my ear, you sing that song, so subtle, so pleasing.  
I say that I want to give you a beautiful ornament I've brought with me;  
I ask you to come closer;  
you extend your hands, wanting to embrace;  
I lightly grasp your waist,  
taking in your vigorous scent.  
Saying how fine it is to hug you,  
seeing you smiling from the heart, my joy increases.  
Pulling out a lovely silk ribbon,  
I soundlessly tie it around your waist,  
saying that I brought it from the *Lanhai*.

You say that, knowing in advance that I was coming today to see you,  
you used your body heat to warm up the lounge chair.  
Pulling out a red lotus shawl, I drape it over your shoulders.  
You say that your love for me is eternal,  
but that you can never leave this shoal...  
I am the merman the sea is my home;  
so I can't remain with you on the shoal all the time.  
Taking with me the magic lamp you have given me,  
I wander throughout this vast body of water.  
See that magic lamp, topped by four wild lilies,  
wafting out your intangible scent all day long.  
I also carry with me that mysterious hummingbird you gave me,  
all day long sporting with that lovely stamen, light-purple and pink,  
making me yearn for you all the more,  
at night on the wide-open sea.  
You say that long ago you gave me a chip of eternal love,  
valid forever, redeemable at any time,  
as long as my love remains true.

Today is the fifth day of the first month of 1947;  
at 5:30 in the morning I meet you in a dream;  
at that time you had already dreamed of a qilin turned into a he,  
with two heads, six torsos, and 26,660 xun in length;  
taking 500,109,800 steps;  
I wake you up.  
I spend the entire day seated in this elevated Bamboo House of yours,  
from the time the fog forms, until it disperses from sunrise to sunset.  
At 10:30 in the evening I leave you, accompanied by the starlight;  
we arrange a time for me to come again,  
when I'll warm your small, cold hands with mine.  
I tell you that no matter how thick the fog and mist,  
somewhere out there I, the Merman, will be eagerly watching over you.  
You tightly grasp my hands, reluctant to let me go,  
but the tide has already reached the elevated Bamboo House,  
compelling me to loosen your grip.

See the sand-hemmed shallows,  
the young and comely Black Bow piloting a square boat,  
raising a square sail, following the spring wind, singing:  
"Blue sea blue green water green,  
the elevated Bamboo House, a sailless, untethered boat.  
White the waves red the setting sun,  
the flowing sands an hourglass,  
coming back after circling the Earth..."

Blue sky white clouds,  
a weather front arrives,  
sky turns dark clouds become black,  
thunder drumming overhead lightning patrolling the great sea;  
surging streams of water freely race about the deep sea.

The weather front departs;  
at dusk the declining sun takes on a fresh red hue.  
Those 11.1 billion magical pixels sealed in the white sky,  
at night that luminous moon, immaculate, pure white,  
lightly stroking you, the lovely Kunshen Maiden.  
The springtime weather is especially fickle,  
clouds float in rain falls again,  
once more sending the luminous moon into hiding.  
All of a sudden, countless small drops of water  
jostle to enter the sea, returning, as it were, to their waiting mother's embrace,  
mixing like milk and water melding into a single, miraculous body;  
inseparable from now on.

Black Bow sings an eternal song...

## Chapter IV

### The Young Shamaness

On this shoal amidst the silvery sea is the elevated Bamboo House,  
numbered 037 by the wind and water.

See the high trellis made of moso bamboo,  
Indra's net of interpenetration hung with red lanterns,  
the shoal and silvery waters looking like the spider webs  
woven all over the Wind Porch and the elevated walkway.  
Glimmering optical fibers interlock,  
red light reflected inside red light,  
bound together with red string,  
formed with red cloth of various hues.

All because a lovely young woman  
is about to go to Kouhu to become the shamaness responsible for supplicating the  
Sea God,  
for the protection of the fishermen along this coast.  
Tonight a young woman has already been selected  
to fulfill the vow made by the fishing people to the Sea God  
to appoint a new shamaness.  
See the new trellis put up at the elevated Bamboo House,  
bamboo poles rising high, exuding a palpable field of energy.

Tonight on the Taiwan Strait  
there is a highly unusual atmosphere.  
See that one-armed youth of the future, alone on the Wind Pavilion,  
two streams of pure tears flow,  
now resigned no way out;  
at the mercy of the wind of sense objects, the surging waters of consciousness;  
dejected, given over to roaming about on this body of water in the Wind Pavilion.

Water is water wave is wave wind is wind,  
but by now he doesn't know who is who.  
I, the merman, sit on an old bamboo raft,  
the Fisher-woman rides in a boat made of sculpted driftwood,  
following Black Bow's Evening Red.  
Arriving at the place where the Wind Pavilion of the lonely youth of the future sets  
out to sea,  
I tell him:  
"You aren't the Merman;  
so your tears won't turn into pearls..."

The Fisher-woman tells him:  
"For the people of this shoal, optimism and freedom from anxiety are a way of life;  
you have no right to grieve;  
for you also have a mission to protect this shoal,  
and bring happiness to the people who live here..."  
Black Bow replies:  
"When you were 13 years old  
you told everybody  
that you used to race the wind and the setting sun on the walkways connecting the  
elevated bamboo houses,  
but never once won,  
never once managed to seize the wind,  
never once managed to get hold of that fiery-red sun.  
Seems that you also know what it's like to miss out!"  
"That pretty maiden is going to Kouhu to become the shamaness  
in order to protect the seafarers along the coast;  
So what have you missed out on?"

Tonight on the shoal  
hundreds of firecrackers, loud as thunder,

split the sky.

See the seafarers along the coast,

gathering round a huge flag

emblazoned with the bright red characters “Southern Despot.”

Tide already risen boats set out to sea;

the only people left on the shoal are those erecting the high trellis hung with red lanterns, singing out:

“We hope that the pretty girl we’ve chosen

will pray for us, the happy-go-lucky shoal-dwellers,

and bring safety to all the people along this coast!”

See those hundreds of boats and rafts slicing through the moonlit water;

see the undulating daylight spraying forth from the peaks of the waves;

the Lighthouse Keeper is about to set out in his *Time Inn*.

In comes the tide out it goes again;

the lovely Kunshen gradually sheds that magical watery garment;

following the wind and waves, the hourglass steadily marks the passing time,

as the moon steadily descends.

See that red wheel of the morning rising up again,

ushering in a new day on the shoal;

see that silvery sea, vast mist approaching from the east,

a mysterious red-black engraving accompanying the blue sea, azure sky, and white surf on the margin of the water;

the Fisher-woman remains very close to the water all day long.

See that churning spindrift in the wake of the fishing boats;

see those gently dancing waves, tossed by the wind.

In this season the plume of the sun sprinkling down from above is especially brilliant on the surface of the sea.

I, the Merman, sense your subtle caress;

you, the lovely Kunshen Maiden,

stretch out your lotus fingers and tightly clasp my thumb;

I stand in the shallows, that watery world,  
surveying from afar those soaring, wind-blown dunes,  
bathed in the rosy hues of morning.

Working in the water  
from sunrise to sunset,  
the day passes quickly.

Still no sight of the Wind Pavilion.

Before long,  
the pure and animated moon stretches forth its fine plume,  
silently caressing the lovely Kunshen.  
Following the swelling tide,  
Black Bow slowly pilots Evening Red back to shore.  
Fond of embracing at night this shoal clad in watery garments,  
Black Bow thoroughly adores this female body, the lovely Kunshen,  
every inch of flesh, every grain of sand.  
Black Bow excitedly stands with us,  
dancing on this female body, watery garments soaked by the rising tide.  
The lovely Kunshen Maiden says to us:  
“Here there are no fair springtime rains,  
but there is that golden drum, cinnabar red.  
In the summer there is no stimulating lavender scent,  
but there is the light and refreshing smell of the ocean.  
In the fall there is no delightful sound of falling leaves,  
but there is the singing golden sand.  
In the winter there is no snow, no sculpted ice palace,  
but in the period between Frost Descends and the Winter Solstice there is the  
Mullet Festival,  
weaving a beautiful dream for the fishing people in their elevated bamboo houses.”  
See that dream veranda, tonight serving as a passage for the wind;  
see that bright orb of the moon flying over,



floating above the shoal like some heavenly lamp;  
wondering where that lonesome youth of the future  
drops anchor tonight.

## Chapter V

### **An Hourglass in the Silvery Sea —The Legend of the Sun**

Black Bow was once the maiden of the sacred dance  
of these golden sands and silvery sea.  
It was in the middle watch of the night  
when that crescent-shaped golden bow discharged a stream of shooting stars.  
Black Bow dreamed that heaven bestowed on me a large, pure-red bow and a  
vermillion arrow feather;  
upon waking there was a seal stamped in cinnabar ink as authentication.  
Then Black Bow's breath enters my left ear,  
out of which emerges a mysterious low buzz;  
a large, pure-red bow,  
a feather attached to a large, cinnabar, tempered arrow;  
the maiden of the sacred dance and the lovely Shamaness  
have fitted the tip of the vermillion arrow  
with the flames of the sun collected  
in a concave mirror  
they have installed on a sunny, leeward spot amongst the golden sands.  
They shoot the arrow into the vast expanse of water;  
penetrating far into the depths of the sea,  
magically transmitting its primordial flame.  
See those flames of the sun bursting forth on the tip of that crimson arrow,  
instantly becoming 81 pieces of bright-red kindling,  
moving about throughout this great body of water;  
instantly regrouping into the billowing flames of the sun,  
riding that crimson arrow up to the highest heavens.  
At one time there was a great concourse of wind, rain, thunder, and lightning,  
when time and space miraculously came together;

instantly igniting that huge flame in the east,  
the sunrise in the east.  
See the first rays of the sun, kindling the glow of dawn.

This was Black Bow's dream,  
a breath of sincerity expressing her thoughts about me.  
I see that today the water is especially bright and transparent;  
the sunrise on the golden sand and silvery sea is especially effulgent.  
It was on the first day of the first month of 1947,  
when she was away on the high seas—the homeland of the wind.  
Due to excessive thinking she had a realistic dream  
in which heaven gave me a red bow and arrow,  
engraved by an old craftsman of uncanny ability.  
A wondrous flaming phoenix dances in the upper sky.  
Presently, the Fisher-woman brings a 73-year-old cauldron  
out of the elevated Bamboo House,  
places it on a slightly raised sand dune,  
pulls out a box of matches, and lights one up;  
soon a fire is blazing inside the cauldron.  
From within this body of pellucid water,  
I observe the golden sand inside the silvery water;  
this is that exceedingly mysterious hourglass in the Taiwan Strait.  
See her magical footsteps following the wind, subtly shifting day and night,  
towards the south;  
ever observing the Milky Way,  
marking the passage of time in the Pacific Ocean;  
forever observing the rising and setting sun,  
displaying an alternative rhythm for the Taiwan Strait.

• **Black Bow—Maiden of the Sacred Dance**

I, the Merman, watch the lovely Fisher-woman in the water off to one side,  
kindling a fire inside the cauldron,  
praying for and blessing the fishing people.  
I, the Merman, contemplate a distant place,  
the birthplace of the wind, where Black Bow is deep in thought,  
considering these golden sands and silvery sea in their entirety.  
A spring cloud enters the sky;  
a mist rises up from the shoal.  
See the tide rushing in,  
inundating the tidal flats,  
as the fishermen of the shoal ride the white surf back to shore.  
Just after dusk,  
at an auspicious hour, the enchanting night is born.  
See that air front, subverting the undulating energy of the sea;  
a crystal-like water curtain hangs from the thatched eaves of the elevated Bamboo  
House;  
see that hovering body, the naked arc of the new moon,  
firing up the engine of the tide.  
A spring wind lightly blows in a fine drizzle,  
as the faint purple star of the northern sky appears in the center of the ocean-sky;  
presently, the Milky Way slowly makes its appearance,  
a typical spring night.  
In an instant, the sky brightens and the air clears,  
wind and waves settle.

The Fisher-woman still stands in the elevated Bamboo House, looking into the  
distance,  
hoping to catch another glimpse of the legendary Lanhai.  
It's said that 73 years ago the Lanhai made a big splash on the shoal,

and ever since then the family of the Fisher-woman has been handing down that lump of ambergris.

I, the Merman, want to return to this day last year  
and see Black Bow, that lovely maiden,  
piloting that magical flying palanquin, riding the wind, smashing the waves.  
See her Evening Red,  
cruising about this pristine body of water,  
pursuing the shamaness of Kouhu,  
praying for the well-being of the fishing people along the coast.  
The color of the sea changes from the red glow of morning to the deep blue of noon,  
at dusk returning to the gold, yellow, and red of the setting sun.

As this subtle optical fiber transforms,  
it emits beautiful supernatural hues of 11.1 billion pixels.  
It's in that lovely dusk  
that Black Bow deeply kisses me goodbye, ready to set about wandering towards the homeland of the wind.  
My thoughts are dragged by the golden-yellow setting sun  
back to the present, the first month of 1947.  
My entire field of vision is taken up by the sight of Black Bow's healthy bronze complexion,  
fluttering about like a butterfly in the distant homeland of the wind.  
Once she was the maiden of the sacred dance, a tradition handed down on the shoal for generations;  
now she has left the shoal, gone to the homeland of the wind,  
in search of the costume of the dancing clay figurine,  
drifting.

## Chapter VI

### Black Bow's Homesickness

"How are you? It has snowed again..."

"The pure-white snow paints a marvelous scene,  
reminding me of you and your fondness for traveling in winter,  
making me wonder if you will come to the homeland of the wind to visit me in the  
frigid early spring.

Peering through the window at the world blanketed in white,  
visited by loneliness,

I remember how you told me:

'There is more than one universe there is more than one hometown.

The closer together the universes,  
the more the hometowns overlapping in a dream.

Each universe has its own laws,  
and its own celestial bodies.'

It was you who told me:

'Every hometown has its dream;  
in every dream there is a hometown...'

In the wink of an eye, I'm in some other place and a month has already passed.

In this complex world,  
for me there is only one smell:  
the smell of the Merman,  
ever reminding me of you."

"For the future of the shoal, I carry two pieces of luggage,  
one digital one artistic,  
each huge, yet immaterial.

I repeatedly consider how to choose.

I feel like a I'm running a marathon,  
giving it all I've got;  
when thirsty, picking up a bottle of water without breaking stride,  
drinking and running at the same time,  
pouring some over my head  
to cool off.  
Here, all I want is the chance  
to let people know about our shoal amidst the silvery sea,  
to let people know about you, the Merman.  
Here, each night when I go to sleep,  
for some reason  
I see you, the Merman.  
You are forever my guardian angel,  
forever my miraculous lover,  
a sort of universal strength formed of diverse causes and conditions,  
an enigma given to me by heaven.  
I forever long for our shoal,  
I forever long for you my Merman..."  
Black Bow, in another world, far, far away.

• **The Primordial Turtle and the Ancient Conch**

Remote past, fountainhead of emptiness,  
Silent mind of profundity,  
Half verse rolling out.  
Imagined web,  
Boundless world of dreams,  
Boundless body of consciousness,  
Mind nowhere to rest,  
Boundless position of thought.

\*

Remote past, fountainhead of emptiness, one still point;

grain after grain of golden sand rises up from the silvery sea.  
The silent mind of profundity divides into two distinct parts, love and affection.  
A half verse rolling out, becoming three-pointed and hidden in empty space;  
an imagined web arranged with four distinct boundaries.  
A dreamed world, infinite, moves in the fifth dimension;  
a limitless body of consciousness becomes a vast expanse in the ocean;  
a limitless position of thought is sealed by the seventh scroll.  
The mind with nowhere to rest transforms in the eighth dimension, transforming  
according to causes and conditions.  
The jeweled mirror of suchness revolves in the effulgent brightness of the ninth  
dimension.  
Reflected response; 1,000 prayers, 1,000 manifestations.  
On the ninth day of the first month of 1947,  
just before sunrise, at 5:15,  
that auspicious moment when the Jade Emperor<sup>19</sup> was born,  
I dream of you wearing a black suit,  
a small purple ribbon in the collar;  
you say that this is the same moment  
when I dreamed that I appeared right next to you.

On the ninth day of the first month of 1947,  
just before sunrise, at 5:15,  
that auspicious moment when the Jade Emperor was born,  
I arrive at your home  
and see that red waist coat still hanging on the back of the chair in front of the  
desk.  
Jacket not yet buttoned up,  
you smilingly come over and give me a hug.  
My thoughts permeate the deep affection of your original aspiration;  
your mind falls onto that lover's blue pillow in a dream.  
I see you in early spring,

---

19. The ruler of heaven and one of the most important gods of the traditional Chinese pantheon.



clearly timid somewhat puzzled, somewhat happy.  
Wrapped up by my love which blots out the sky and covers the earth,  
you are somewhat taken aback,  
yet your heart is suffused with joy.  
Like the affection between parent and child,  
an eternal, genuine love.  
The 84,000 pores on your entire body are encompassed by my love.  
You change into a red jacket  
with a small black ribbon in the lapel,  
cream-colored pants,  
and a blue-green waist cloth,  
saying you want to take me to the lee side of the sand dunes to watch the sunset.

Your expression overflows with love;  
your cheeks exude the radiance of pure affection.  
You say that I, the Merman, am like a primordial turtle,  
and that you, the Fisher-woman, are like an ancient conch;  
that our mutual love was arranged 3,000 years ago,  
brought to fulfillment in the present.  
You say that as the primordial turtle I carry you, as the lovely Kunshen, on my  
back,  
slowly, silently, shifting your position in the vast sea,  
from north to south.  
You say that I am your moving target;  
although I'm constantly changing position,  
you use your bow of pure affection  
and your arrow tempered by true love  
to hit the bluish-green bull's eye every time,  
no matter how far away,  
even if stone-drunk in a dream.  
See the surging waves lapping at the hem of the umbrella,

everywhere colliding with that pan of golden sand amidst the water,  
completely made of my drops of sweat.

• **The Moving Sand Castle**

Water rolling in the sea,  
arrows with snow-white feathers shooting all about.  
The fishing people of the shoal know the importance of sharing,  
know the importance of honoring heaven and earth.  
In this tiny village forsaken by time  
there are 333 fishing families living in elevated bamboo houses.  
Inside their magical fishing nets is found  
the genetic code of happiness and complete contentment.  
One day Black Bow came from the high seas with some news;  
it's said that the distant rain forests are slowly disappearing;  
the ice at the South Pole is gradually melting;  
and that the golden sands of this shoal are steadily eroding.  
Today rainwater converges  
on the four corners of the Wind Porch;  
the railings of the elevated walkways are all hung with pearls.  
The thatched roofs  
are all covered with a watery sheet, thin and transparent.  
Inside the homes meals are being cooked,  
served in dishes with a century of flavor.  
The fishing people here are extremely simple, but never lonely;  
highly spirited, but shy about expressing emotion.  
See those waves tossed up by the wind,  
wind dragging out the rain front.  
All of the fishing people are at home  
discussing the plan to put up a ten-meter-high awning in the spring  
for a performance of glove puppetry  
by the old master from Kouhu.

These golden sands and silvery sea an off-shore sand world in the Taiwan Strait,  
a barrier umbrella set up by heaven  
to protect the seafarers living along the coast,  
the manifestation of Kunshen in the form of a moving sand castle,  
the condensed tears of the Merman transformed by the wind into golden grains of  
sand.

See the naked body of the Kunshen Maiden,  
formed of the Merman's tears.

It's that subterranean stream below the ocean floor,  
subtly moving south,  
set in motion by the cinnabar arrow silently shot from Black Bow's ornate bow,  
standing on the bow of Evening Red while heading east through the great mist.

It's that Fisher-woman using her dexterous hands  
to put up traditional fisherman's huts made of moso bamboo,  
a scenic wonder of this world of golden sand in the Taiwan Strait.

It's that fishing boat made of driftwood.

It's that fishing raft fashioned out of giant green bamboo;  
watercraft like so many leaves freely floating about this world of water.

See that tide slowly receding from the shoal in the early morning,  
as the red orb of the sun hangs high in the east.

The Fisher-woman shoulders the bamboo basket she has woven herself,  
takes up her pick and harrow, and begins gathering clams,  
aquatic creatures run aground,  
a supernatural gift given up by the sea.

On a tiny sand dune the Fisher-woman finds a small, ancient conch,  
following the southeast wind, arrived here to make a splash.

### • **Spring on this Body of Water**

Today force-9 winds blow over the water,  
waves dancing on snow drifts,  
billows surging in the spring wind,

boats and rafts chasing one another on the water,  
wave upon mountainous wave leaping over the azure blue horizon,  
band after band of current widely marking off its greenish-blue space.  
See that brilliant white spindrift dashing about in all directions,  
off in the distance, the elevated bamboo houses  
with wind flags hung high atop newly erected poles of black bamboo.  
The Fisher-woman, barefoot, ten toes in the shallows,  
calves soaked by the salty water.

Today the spring sea wears the mask of autumn.  
See those gales of wind, that wheel dying red the horizon,  
a watery mist splashing the sky all around the elevated bamboo houses.  
See the sea of early spring,  
affectionately caressed by the ardent spring wind  
with a charm beyond compare.

The Fisher-woman sings the song of the sea in a loud voice,  
as shuttlelike fishing boats poke their heads out from the crests of the waves,  
first to be greeted by the fiery-red sun setting on the horizon.  
Fishermen rowing briskly with a sense of tempo,  
as a dragon coursing through the sky dispatches the wind and clouds;  
at dusk the rosy surface of the water calms,  
wind gradually settles.

The countenance of these outlying waters has now returned to spring;  
unfurling her rolled up pants,  
the Fisher-woman crosses barefoot over the elevated bamboo walkway.  
See that sculpture of light carved on the water by the setting sun;  
see those strips of multicolored brocade  
floating on the surface of the water.

The Fisher-woman returns to the elevated Bamboo House and effortlessly puts up  
a pole of black bamboo,  
waving the wind flag on top

to call the 333 fishermen back to the shoal.  
The tide is already swelling,  
a transparent watery garment now covers the shoal.  
The smell of the ocean fills the Bamboo House,  
surrounded by fishing boats tied down on all sides.  
Fishermen return to their bamboo homes,  
expectant loved ones in the doorway.  
Only the sanguine Fisher-woman remains waiting,  
forever waiting for me, the Merman, to return every year on the Eight Royal Days.

A boat sailing on the water    sail catching the wind;  
the Fisher-woman rises in the early morning to watch the sunrise.  
The shoal has already shed that watery garment it donned last night,  
revealing a dazzling array of geometric patterns  
etched into the golden sand by the retreating current.  
See that cloud banner suspended high on the horizon;  
see that moist and bright world of golden sand,  
myriads of carefree fiddler crabs hitting the stage;  
see that surf rolling up the rosy clouds of dawn into its hundred plaits;  
off in the distance a long, suspended wave  
silently sets aright a punter's skiff hanging off the peak of a billow,  
sending it on its way.

## Chapter VII

### The Victor of the Water World

It's said that tonight there was some shifting of the Pacific Plate,  
causing the subterranean stream to set in motion an incredibly huge wave far out at  
sea,

now speeding towards the shoal,  
spinning the mysterious undercurrent  
and tossing about the boats and rafts at sea.

Wind blows the silhouette of a butterfly fluttering on the water,  
turns out to be two skiffs bobbing up and down, united in their struggle against the  
waves.

See the arched bottoms of the boats turning into curved blades,  
slicing their way  
through the watery peaks.

Highly skilled navigators, the fisherman here  
fear not the wind and the waves.

Having locked horns with this vast body of water over the course of so many years,  
in the end the true victor is revealed.

Dwelling on this floating plate of golden sand,  
they are content with their lot,  
a happy people, unencumbered by desire,  
long-time associates of the sea, no fear of hardship.

In the shallows of the shoal  
a mysterious anchor, lost from some ship,  
shimmers brightly  
on moonlit nights.

One rainy night, that anchor—the name of which I know not—  
dreamed that its skipper had left it behind in error, without any identifying mark;

dropped into the world of sand, unable to leave,  
it has a recurrent dream.

One night it dreamed about something that happened 110 years in the past:

“It was in early spring, on the fifth watch of the night,  
just before sunrise.

My skipper was navigating a mighty, inconceivable channel,  
when the sunlight rippling on the sea  
was tossed about by the purple light of the yet-to-rise sun.”

To this day it continues to cherish that scene;  
its skipper loves falling in love with this body of water.  
See that tide, day and night pursuing the flow of time;  
going out, running back coming back, running out.

One night, especially dark and windy,  
waves and billows leaping up,  
like a million Ferghana horses galloping over the sea.  
The skipper’s boat is drawn into the center of a huge vortex,  
ominously swirling,  
surging spray splashing all the masts.

On that night nobody on the boat is able to sleep,  
anchor rising and falling on that deep, deep sea;  
not a single fish swimming,  
not a single boat in sight;  
in the hold, nobody sings,  
countless curtains of water  
splash the deck.

Sea bellows tide rages,  
angry winds blow down the rain.

In the skipper’s log is written  
the thirteenth day of the twelfth month.

Suddenly,

the skipper transforms the ship into a supernatural quadrant,  
dropping anchor, hauling it in lifting anchor, dropping it again.

The skipper says:

“Ah Anchor, ah Anchor,

Who would have known that you are Pangu.<sup>20</sup>

You once used your magical ax to create the world,  
separating earth and heaven,

breaking out of that primordial egg of chaos.

It was then that a misty light manifested in the east,  
instantly slicing downwards

to open up the virgin ground of chaos.

Some time ago the bow became an anchor.

Tonight wake up, oh Anchor, wake up,  
wield your unlimited miraculous powers.”

On that night the anchor returned to the past,

dreaming of that real sort of life lived in the past,

when that magical ax sent forth an inconceivable light,

sending all the people back to their primordial past,

when everybody had a brilliant radiance on the top of the head.

That was a world of love, affection, and hope,

when all sentient beings were of just this sort, just as all waters have the same taste  
when reaching the ocean.

At that time, the sunlight was sometimes obscured by clouds or fog, but these  
inevitably dispersed,

allowing the bright sky to reappear.

Instantly, the anchor's thoughts return to the present;

realizing that the future is not cut off,

it turns into that magical ax which formed the world,

giving off its inconceivable light,

---

20. Creator of the universe in Chinese mythology.



interacting with this body of water  
and the tidal flats which limit the wind, rain, and waves.  
The anchor responds to the roar of the sea with its pure thought,  
out of great compassion, tirelessly struggling for seven days and seven nights.  
Finally, the anchor uses the secret sound of the universe, the half verse rolling out,  
to reign in the whirlwind;  
to call on Axiang<sup>21</sup> to carry off the thunderstorm;  
to take the skipper's boat to a safe place  
in this limpid sea, bright and effulgent...

In the shallows of the shoal  
a mysterious anchor, lost from some ship,  
shimmers brightly  
on moonlit nights...

That night, Black Bow reluctantly lifts anchor,  
the shoal illuminated by a thousand heavenly lamps,  
under the night sky the fishing people happy and content.  
Tonight no candles are lit in the elevated bamboo huts,  
no kerosene lamps,  
only the glimmering flashes of red in the sky.  
The eyes of the Fisher-woman are able to talk;  
you use your eyes to tell me,  
"Though reluctant, Black Bow has already lifted anchor."  
You want me to remain  
here in this forsaken world of water and golden sand,  
here in this forsaken pan of golden sand,  
detaining me with your deeply affectionate expression.

---

21. The female charioteer of the God of Thunder.

## Chapter VIII

### The Inconceivable Channel

Dusk during the rainy season;  
we embrace on the elevated bamboo walkway;  
close to my ear, you exhort me three times,  
with utmost sincerity  
and solicitude,  
to retrieve some ambergris  
and bring it back to the shoal,  
like an expert sailor navigating some inconceivable channel.  
I haven't the heart  
to watch those affectionate tears fall from your eyes,  
each drop more transparent and glistening than my own.  
My hands on your shoulders, rocking your body,  
my spirit lightly touches your sleeve,  
harboring that delicate heart.  
Next to your ear, I say that I'll miss you;  
next to my ear,  
you say that you'll place the mind of profundity into my third eye,  
so that whenever I need you, you will know it,  
turn into the lovely Kunshen, enter the sea, and come to find me.  
You bid me not to worry,  
to joyfully traverse that inconceivable, mysterious channel,  
and bring back that magical ambergris.

Dusk during the rainy season;  
I receive from you seven red flowers, a star,  
and two ancient bejeweled candles in a box colored yellow, red, blue, and green,  
brought by the Ferryman from the small harbor at Dongshi.

You transform into a meandering river  
and from the distant wharf pour into the depths of my vast ocean.  
See those seven red flowers of yours resting inside a long bamboo basket with a tassel;  
a star representing the blessings of Polaris,  
two candles representing safety and happiness,  
as well as that celestial wish-fulfilling tree, beautiful, geometrical, august,  
supporting the sky.  
From the side it appears as if that winding river you have become  
is meandering on my chest.  
You have also entrusted the Ferryman with a message:  
On that distant coastline, you are going to plant for me a patch of beautiful water plants.  
You are also going to plant a miraculous flowering tree,  
and give it to me when it becomes mature and beautiful.  
I am the great sea you are the numberless rivers and streams,  
pure and full of life.

Following that dusk during the rainy season,  
Black Bow and I head out in Evening Red to trace the course of that dream.  
How, then, are we to pass beyond the world of deception and reach that heaven amidst the water,  
that formless and signless center point of the grid,  
where that mysterious ambergris is to be found?..  
Forthwith, I turn into a huge, beautiful fish—the name of which I know not—  
and plunge into the depths of the sea.  
On that formless, signless waterway at the bottom of the sea  
is the emblem of the great mind of enlightenment,  
with brilliant, fragrant banners floating all about.  
After following various paths marked off by the banners, one after another,  
I, the Merman, finally find a path the color of rosy clouds.

Following it, I come upon a gorgeous sari, fine and ethereal,  
formerly the dance costume of the clay figurine.

A strong scent  
enters my nose;

the supernatural ambergris is ensconced inside the dance costume of that  
mysterious clay figurine;

I plan to take it back to the shoal and give it to the fishing people.

Back on the shoal, you are piecing together a shattered mirror  
in order to collect the energy of the sun  
and heat up the cool waters of spring.

You, the Fisher-woman, have developed a unique talent:

When thinking of me, all you have to do is bring your thoughts to a complete halt  
after exactly 37 seconds,

and you see where I am

and what I'm doing,

clearly

and completely.

Tonight, waves lick at the sky the north wind whips up the billows,  
as the surging tide lifts up the boats.

Under the setting sun

sets of golden oars cut pure-white paths through the deep blue waters.

See that light riding the waves, filling the sky, chasing the whirling billows.

Kunshen is like a mysterious, elegant maiden,

dreaming, leisurely reclining in the water.

Tonight, high up in the sky, the full moon opens its big eye.

See those fishermen on the water, locked in combat with the waves,

suddenly shooting ten meters into the sky,

swallowing up the boats and rafts and then spitting them out,

putting the skills of these master mariners to the test.

See those boats and rafts, no fear of the wind and waves,  
gracefully leaping from the gyrating tops of the billows,  
entering and leaving the water in pursuit of schools of fish.  
In these waters are found dreamlike flying fish  
which leap into the fisherman's boats as if in a dream.

On that night the Lighthouse Keeper brings some news to the offshore shoal:  
It's said that on that night somebody ran from winter to spring, covering 7,300  
kilometers in 111 days,  
wearing out 11 pairs of shoes while traversing the polar regions.  
It's also said that on that night a lone mariner piloted a single-mast sailboat,  
circumnavigating the entire Pacific Ocean in the course of 137 days,  
encountering 11 great rainstorms along the way,  
traversing 7,300 nautical miles before finally returning to that primordial base, the  
fisherman's wharf.  
It's also said that on that night somebody climbed each of the Seven Summits,<sup>22</sup>  
and that an expedition climbed a certain peak of 7,300 meters,  
everybody leaping for joy at the sight of the mysterious northern lights.  
On that night in this body of water,  
each wave stronger than the next,  
each billow bigger than the next,  
all the fishing boats and rafts  
alternately swallowed up and spit out by huge waves and wild waters.  
Yet, the fishermen here are all very skilled,  
fearing not the wind and waves,  
happily going out fishing.

---

22. The highest mountains on each of the seven continents.

## Chapter IX

### **The Grid of the Elevated Bamboo Houses in Spring**

Spring is the favorite season of the fishing people;  
the Fisher-woman follows the path of the sunrise in search of today's happiness  
index;

on the sea, the blue hues of early-morning slowly turn into a colorful scene of  
riotous profusion.

See those rosy clouds of dawn, like a peacock spreading its feathers,  
slicing the surface of the water into symmetrical grids,  
endlessly multiplied inside and out.

This year my shamaness is 18 years old.

While still a girl, the mysterious pretty maiden, Grandma of the Night,  
obtained a supernatural ability

by which she uses the power of the mind  
to place a set of natural elements—wind, rain, clouds, fog, thunder, lightning, air,  
and the morning and evening twilight—  
into each of the grids on the sea,  
rather like making a movie in the mind;  
every day a new premiere,  
every day a freeze frame.

Spring is the favorite season of the fishing people;  
the Fisher-woman follows the path of the sunrise in search of today's happiness  
index.

This season the fishermen of this shoal  
have had an especially bountiful catch in this silvery sea.

See those hundred-some fishing boats dispersed throughout the Taiwan Strait;  
see this body of water, waves and billows converging and flowing,  
raft upon raft in crisscrossing pursuit of one another.

It's on this body of water that Black Bow rides the wind and smashes the waves,  
saying that as long as she has the sea in her heart, she will never be lonely.

The Fisher-woman steps out of the water shed.  
See those silvery waters covered by the sky,  
spreading this floating stage with golden sand,  
the Fisher-woman now enjoying the golden era of the elevated bamboo houses.  
See those grains of golden sand glittering in the transparent water;  
see those grains of golden sand singing in the transparent water,  
the foreground of the rosy dawn dancing with the snow-white surf;  
wind moving along the surface of the water,  
rolling up the reddened waves.  
Clouds leisurely float across the sky,  
the limpid sea painting ink-wash paintings, one after another;  
The Fisher-woman steps out of the water shed  
and sees a group of women  
gathered together, weaving fishing nets;  
this a place where hands work with remarkable dexterity.  
See those bubbles on the water ensconced in the early-morning plume of the sun;  
see those grains of moisture-laden golden sand.  
The Fisher-woman sees a white wave off in the distance,  
tangled up with a snowy billow,  
the green water playing hide-and-seek with the blue sky.

The Fisher-woman steps out of the water shed,  
passes the lee side of the dunes, and comes to the shallows.  
She sees a group of fishermen digging a well in search of fresh water,  
as well as a group of nimble workers  
building a lighthouse  
which will house a revolving light visible up to 13 nautical miles away.  
This spring the shoal is especially bustling with activity.

Off in the distance billows pounce on waves, the tide chases the wind,  
a raft glides across the lithe surface of the water,  
as the foaming surf turns into a mist and soaks the front part of the fishermen's  
clothing.

See that golden sand rolling and clustering in the morning and evening tide,  
subtly shifting towards the south.

I, the Merman, and you, Kunshen,  
together supporting that umbrella, that sky-driven sail, keeping it here for the time  
being.

Dusk, the fiery-red disk of the sun pasted onto the water-sky of rippling color;  
fishermen flexing their powerful arms,  
now bent in, now stretched out,  
turning their oars into spinning wheels.

Kunshen Kunshen the lovely Kunshen Maiden,  
yet another Fisher-woman in early adulthood.

The 333 elevated bamboo houses on the shoal form a small village.

When evening approaches  
the tide gathers momentum;  
waves ascending ever upwards,  
current stirring current wave poking wave.

A high mast props up the sea fog,  
a white sail reflects the red sun,  
an other-worldly umbrella leisurely reclining on the water.  
See the final glow of the setting sun,  
ardently illuminating the crests of Kunshen's dunes of golden sand.

In this body of water, I, the Merman, move about like the wind,  
tonight unimpeded by the shape of the waves or the form of the billows.  
See those fishermen, reveling in their beautiful dreams, woven in their own designs,  
happily passing their days.



See those fisher-women happily mending fishing nets under the moonlight,  
nimble needle leading thread,  
sewing together sail after sail, like the outstretched wings of a black bat flying  
through the night.  
Listen to the tide rising high in the night,  
a mysterious pulsation,  
as if the sound of a water zither<sup>23</sup> inside an ancient crystal palace.  
Suddenly, in the dead of night, a careening wave collides with a zigzagging raft,  
a twisting, shifting trench  
sending out a mysterious sort of water element, leaping to rebirth.  
Instantly the lovely Fisher-woman opens her eyes wide, draws in a breath, and  
concentrates:  
“Ah, it’s raining;  
the easterlies of spring have carried in the rainy season.”

Tonight Black Bow rows alone on the vast sea,  
successively splitting open the spindrift stuffed with moonlight.  
I see you, the lovely Fisher-woman,  
gentle as moonlight, meandering in my dream,  
sweetly smiling,  
countenance exuding delight.

---

23. A type of Japanese garden ornament and musical device.

## Chapter X

### Meeting during the Lantern Festival

Last night, Venus in the west after dusk, vermillion clouds bursting in the sky;  
early morning, Venus in the east before dawn, snowy white light rising over the sea.  
See those long waves, wings of the water;  
see that surging tide, the watery wings of the wind.  
Another weather front is passing through the Taiwan Strait,  
wind is born, waters rise up into snow lotuses, one after another,  
chasing the waves like so many leaping horses,  
turning over 108 times in the wink of an eye;  
sporadic force-13 gusts send the dance step of the water into confusion.  
Beginning in his youth,  
the Ferryman has been known thus;  
for he has always had a white tuft ensconced within his black hair.  
His boat, a family heirloom,  
has seen better days;  
yet, with the youthful Ferryman at the oars,  
it skips over the waves like a magic carpet.

The rain begins to fall,  
at first dropping onto the surface of the sea;  
myriads of small drops,  
as numerous as the grains of sands in the Ganges,  
mixing with the milky water of the sea.  
Thereupon, innumerable watery arrows come shooting forth from the clouds,  
penetrating right into the pith of the sea.  
It's last night's white clouds dyed with the rosy hues of the setting sun  
turning into today's deep black;  
it's last night's pure white waves leaping out of the azure blue surface of the sea,

turning into today's rainy sky;  
in the wink of an eye, a thunder shower gives way to clear skies.  
It's no wonder the people of the estuary say:  
"The spring weather is as fickle as a stepmother's mood!"

Black Bow has fitted Evening Red with a skylight  
to usher in the moonlight,  
only to discover that it also brings in the scorching rays of the sun,  
a sort of mobile interface card.  
See those rays of light riding the waves,  
streaming about like the pleated skirt of some lovely dancing maiden;  
layer upon layer of snowy waves brimming with the rainbowlike radiance of spring.  
Boat and water work as one,  
foam flying out bubbles floating up,  
a mysterious score jointly composed by boat and water,  
gracefully leaping up, overflowing, only to disappear.  
Hands in rapid motion,  
Black Bow spins that pair of oars.  
This sea is like a virtual watery garment,  
now the blade of a wave now a sharp-edged billow,  
wanting to leave the mark of time on Black Bow's Evening Red.  
See the distant vault of heaven,  
a floating patch of pink becomes a mysterious red phoenix  
dancing in that bright and effulgent quadrant.

Cruising along in Evening Red in the limpid water-sky,  
Black Bow sees a group of dignified hawksbill sea turtles  
and a group of king crabs, envoys of remote antiquity;  
thereupon, she leads them back out to the depths of the sea.  
The key to crossing the sea of sorrow today is the first day of the Lantern Festival,  
a customary time for lovers to rendezvous;

one cycle of the waxing and waning of the moon takes 29.53 days.

The happy-go-lucky fishing people all know  
that today is an auspicious day, the happiness of which will last throughout the  
year.

Black Bow steadily pilots Evening Red back to the shoal,  
knowing that on the Wind Porch of the Fisher-woman's elevated Bamboo House  
will be held a much-anticipated engagement:

You, her  
and three pretty maidens, will together wait for the Merman  
to return from that inconceivable channel with the ambergris.

On the horizon, the rosy clouds of dusk give off a red light,  
as if inside a palace of red lapis lazuli.

As eight young maidens await the return of the Merman,  
Black Bow hoists a high-masted sail,  
riding a tail wind towards the setting sun, that water-world, those golden sands and  
silvery sea.

She sees a hovering osprey dive straight down into the water  
to catch the fish deep below the surface,  
as a layer of red-black light colors the water-sky.  
See that ebullient red pervading the misty sky,  
wave upon wave of resplendent spindrift,  
layer upon layer of immense billows,  
as the declining orb of the sun lays out a gallery road<sup>24</sup> of fresh red  
over this animated body of water beneath the sky.

See the Ferryman piloting the *Boathouse*, the Peach Blossom Sister on board,  
the Lighthouse Keeper piloting *Time Inn*, the Oyster Monger and the mysterious  
Grandma of the Night on board,  
all heading for the shoal.

See those swirling waves, colliding and forging onwards;  
see those annular waves clustering around the twisting tide.

---

24. A type of hanging walkway consisting of planks supported by beams wedged into holes cut into the side of a cliff. Also known as a "plank way," in pre-modern China these were commonly used to traverse mountainous areas.

Fisher-woman Fisher-woman the lovely Fisher-woman  
has already summoned the fishermen, putting up that tall bamboo pole  
topped with that remarkable wind flag.  
On the Wind Porch  
the Fisher-woman has already put out nine leisure chairs of moso bamboo,  
waiting for me, the Merman, to return,  
as well as all of us who have agreed to meet every year on the Lantern Festival.

Today the setting sun emits a mystical purple light,  
a pretty maiden unknown to me pilots a boat of dried leaves;  
another pretty maiden I've never seen before uses a ridge pole to fashion a raft;  
yet another pretty maiden rides a boat in the shape of a wave;  
all sailing the glowing path of the setting sun  
to this water-world of golden sand and silvery sea,  
to meet with the Fisher-woman and I, the Merman.

## Chapter XI

### **The Fisher-woman's Wait    The Wind-settling Pearl**

"Come here— come here,"  
says the wave as it pushes the tide.  
See that body of water tightly hugging and kissing these golden sands and silvery  
sea;  
In the dreams of the fishermen, the wind rocks their boats and sways their rafts.  
A mist sets out from the east   first glimmer of light emerges,  
a half-flower sun reticently peeks through the deep blue.  
See that first light of dawn,  
suddenly piercing through the trench of moist fog left over from the night before;  
a gushing spindrift soaks a seven-colored flag;  
at a deep place in the sea a mobile set of veins fervently drives the wind.  
See that world of nude golden sand, that moist fog pervading the watery vapor  
coursing through the sky.  
This vast body of water has always been filled with this pure, bright liquid,  
this pure blue sea harboring innumerable secrets.  
These are the fishing people living on this off-shore shoal in the Taiwan Strait,  
long secluded from the world   independent;  
this is the ancestral homeland of the fishing people,  
their fountainhead of joy.

I, the Merman, am your messenger of light,  
emerged from that pure blue sea,  
silently touching your deepest being.  
See that slice of cloud in the distant sky,  
transforming into a mountain, condensing into rain;  
see Black Bow off in the distance opening that snow-white sail,  
dyed a deep red by the indomitable, fiery sun.

A wise yi bird lands on top of the mast;  
Black Bow tells it that today he won't set out for the high seas,  
whereupon the yi bird flies off  
and suddenly draws out a streak of vivid rosy clouds,  
just like the wings of a butterfly fluttering about in the southern skies.  
In the north there suddenly appear several black clouds,  
occluding the sun like the dark wings of a bat,  
carrying off the rosy clouds.  
The lovely Kunshen Maiden, the Fisher-woman at 17,  
presently fashioning an hourglass out of moso bamboo.  
Rain soaks the elevated Bamboo House,  
wind bends the water curtain,  
a celestial light lays out a greenish blue gallery road in the deep blue sea.  
See that elevated path beating out its endless pita pat,  
as the upper cloud banks begin to disperse,  
and the silent brightness returns to the sea.

For three days in a row the shoal has been covered by dense black clouds,  
drenching rain falling like an avalanche;  
gusts of wind and rain reeled in by that cloud in today's clear sky;  
last night the surges of tide brought the billows crashing on the shore,  
only to return to this vast silence.  
Early morning silvery sea still in ebb,  
a few pools remain amidst the sand;  
swarms of crabs, shells in tote, sport in the water,  
then return to that tiny paradise.  
Fish stranded in the tidal flats;  
a wave makes an S-curve and skips across the water,  
as the mild sunlight soothes the mood of the surf.  
The Fisher-woman, a manifestation of the lovely Kunshen Maiden,  
lightly touches the golden sand with ten fingertips,

foreseeing that today's weather will alternate between overcast, clear, and thundershowers.

See that celestial light, instantly turning into a thousand beautiful sights,  
so many evanescent flower petals, as it were, sporadically dropping between the rippling waves of light;  
after dusk another front will bring in more mist  
and another nighttime thundershower.

Surveying the distant waters, the Fisher-woman observes the surf vigorously weaving a tapestry,

as gauzy white waves chase each other's tails.

See that vast expanse of water, ever sketching the background of this silvery sea;  
see that golden sand spreading out as far as the eye can see,  
the wind fluttering out a bicolor print in black and white.

After dusk, the sea progressively sheds its red and golden-yellow hues,  
waves and billows ever hitching a ride on the rising and falling tides.

A wave rends a rift on a billow,  
only to be mended by the moonlight.

A great leviathan ensconced in the expansive Taiwan Strait,  
modest,

gregarious,  
expectantly waiting for the Merman  
to return with that Wind-settling Pearl.

Every morning, the rising sun visits the shoal,  
bringing with it a fresh tide, wave by wave.

Every dusk, the setting sun visits the shoal  
to roll up the old network of waves and tow them back out to sea.

Today the waves are close together,  
nary a trace of separation to be seen;  
from time to time a virtual cloud drifts through the blue-green water-sky watched



over by a compassionate purple eye.  
See the power of the converging waves and billows,  
producing a magical sort of element for this water-world.  
Last night the Sea God, heeding the pious prayers of the Fisher-woman,  
gathered up those force-9 gales  
and placed them snugly into his pocket.  
Fisher-woman Fisher-woman she has a sweet taste flowing into her heart,  
for last night in the Bamboo House  
she consulted the stars to confirm the true love of her sweetheart.  
See those luminous clouds dyeing the crests of the waves;  
see that brilliant aurora imbibing the dreamy haze;  
at a distant place on the silvery sea a whitecap takes the form of a snow crane  
and dances on the water,  
as a billow chasing the wind inadvertently leaves a series of shadowy traces  
on the mind of this great sea.  
The Fisher-woman strolls barefoot on the golden sand,  
a pair of stout-yet-shapely soles firmly planted in the moist sand.  
“Boats, oh boats fishing boats racing on the sea,  
rafts, oh rafts rafts waving to one another on this body of water,  
waves endlessly long illimitable tide,  
a vast expanse of water, a boundless coastline.”  
See that path of light on the golden sand,  
proudly dancing out the fishing people’s hearts and minds.

## Chapter XII

### **The Mysterious Embodiment of the Leviathan**

Dainty and refined, heart delicately wrought,  
you are my lovely putto in the form of a mermaid,  
the transformation of a leviathan.

In my dreams there often appears an openwork net  
giving off an arched curve of light, like the deep affection in your eyes.

You say that I am this sea,  
and that you are the thousand rivers forever rushing towards me.

That day when I brought a snow-white cloud  
you came to meet me wearing a tight-fitting black top,  
that small, blue-striped ribbon I gave you still in the lapel,  
and dark-blue pants to match the green sea.

Today I have come to the shoal to tell you goodbye;  
this time I've brought a cloudlike sleeping bag,  
intending to swim across that inconceivable virgin waterway.

Embracing me tightly, passionately kissing my lips,  
your eyes revealing sincere and unlimited concern.

You say that this time you won't be able to put out to sea with me,  
that you can't be that wise yi bird in my dream,  
draped in moonlight, leading the way.

You say that you can never leave this shoal,  
for the fishing people here need you to look after them;  
just as the lovely Shamaness of Hukou can never be married off,  
as long as you live, you must steadfastly watch over the fishing people of this  
coastal region.

You say that in your embodiment as the thousand streams and rivers, you are one  
with this body of water,  
both of which emit

an inconceivable subtle energy.

You want me to go out and fully experience the direction of the wind currents on this body of water;  
you say that you will remain here on the shoal, forever waiting for me.

See those waves patting the shoulders of the surf,  
as a wind blows the bamboo curtains on the veranda,  
revealing someone in the garret, deeply yearning,  
an affection so full that it pervades the entire elevated bamboo walkway.  
See that yearning, passing through the Wind Porch  
floating into my dreamlike sea.

Tonight on the shoal the wind pokes the shifting sand,  
tonight on the silvery sea a wave tangles up the ropes of a sail,  
as a tall mast vigorously swings in the moonlight,  
my two hands wiping off that rainlike sweat.

That was a brilliant time an era of happiness.

On that night, my lovely putto in the form of a mermaid,  
looks after these golden sands and silvery sea, inundated by fog and mist,  
this world of sand amidst the water, entirely covered with a feeling of separation.  
Off in the distance, the thousand rivers and streams become a wave of love,  
the affectionate water curtain wants me to slow my pace.

See that pair of eyes, transmitting affection through the moonlight,  
imploping me not to depart.

At that time the spray coming off of the edge of the water curtain, full of rainbows  
embellished with lace,

flashes with waves of light, like an eternal lover  
wildly dancing in the spring time for her sweetheart.

See that sheet of water grazed by the wind,  
full of snow-lotus arks...

For a long time now I have been drifting about,

alone on these azure waters;  
these waves and billows a solution of pure moisture;  
the vaporous clouds and misty fog, the miniature gap  
left behind by the multilayered swirling motion of this body of water.  
The you I love is the manifestation of the mysterious Kunshen in the South Sea,  
my lovely putto in the form of a mermaid.

See that sheet of golden sand and silvery sea,  
the waves and the tide nightly crashing against the shore.  
I slowly approach the center of this vast body of water,  
entering that virgin channel, inconceivable and mysterious.  
See that dazzling wave leaping about on the roulette wheel of the wind and water,  
a stream of moonlight sweeping across a thousand terrifying waves.  
The thundering howl of the sea bellows forth from that airtight body of water,  
a shape-shifting ancient conch  
installs itself in a hole inside a piece of driftwood  
to get a glimpse of this marvelous water-world.  
I, the Merman, closely observe  
the density and critical point  
of the waves and tide.  
See that body of water with its latent rhythmic energy,  
swallowing up and spitting out the endless energy produced by the wind and the  
waves,  
banner-shaped, overlapping, crashing down from above,  
repeatedly sweeping over this bright and effulgent space,  
folding up, entering a scroll far and near, noisily embracing, taking refuge,  
exuding a tranquil purity.

I, the Merman, depart from the Taiwan Strait,  
leaving behind the Fisher-woman, a manifestation of the lovely Kunshen Maiden,  
alone, traversing 7,300 nautical miles,

to the eastern Pacific,  
to find Black Bow, gone to the homeland of the wind.  
I pass by a dream pass by a sea.  
See that mysterious planet;  
see that conjured city, that castle in the air;  
perhaps a figment of the imagination,  
perhaps that dream never was,  
no such body of water, no such mysterious star,  
just that chronic longing,  
that long-desired object deeply imprinted on my dream.  
See today's blue sea, filling the sky with white flowers,  
the lucid blue surface of the water revealing a fine layer of primordial gauze.  
On the surface of that primordial mirror of lapis lazuli, I see her beautiful image;  
she combs her curly locks braids it into two long braids.  
On her neck a red-checkered ribbon;  
draped in a full-length skirt,  
adorned all over with tick-tack-toe figures of purple, yellow, red, blue, and green;  
fluttering pink feathers encircle her waist;  
on the lower hem of her skirt a large red rose in bloom,  
along with light-green slacks,  
a pair of purple and red shoes  
embroidered with two flowers, small and red;  
on the back of her dress is a large golden-yellow sunflower.  
Suddenly, a wind stirs up on the sea, etching wrinkles on that primordial mirror of  
lapis lazuli,  
and the image disappears.

## Chapter XIII

### The Story of the Golden Hourglass

The rain is the first to know you know that it becomes water, becomes ice,  
becomes a cloud then, draped with the seven colors of the dawn, traverses the  
horizon.

\*

This is the story of the family living at house 037,  
as told on the Spring Equinox of 1974...  
about a tale told on the Winter Solstice of 1937 by a 64-year-old grandfather  
to his 14-year-old grandson a reminiscence.  
The Birth of Winter,<sup>25</sup> 1900...  
111 years of rising and falling tides brings us to  
the Birth of Spring, 2011...

In 1924 the old man was one year old in 1874 Azu was one year old;  
in 1937 the old man was 14 in 1900 Azu was 27;  
in 2008 the old man was 85 in 1937 Azu was 64.  
It was just like that;  
wind blows, time passes.  
Thirteen scrolls are completed and made into a bridge.

---

25. The 19th of the 24 two-week periods in the Chinese lunar calendar, approximately November 7th to November 21st in the Gregorian calendar.

## Chapter XIV

### **The Farmers' Almanac —The History of the Fishing People**

Again visiting the shoal the group of three makes a creative documentary;  
bamboo-frame windows one after another, one always graced with song.

1900–2011 windsurfing clouds;

a huge mast,

a skysail catching the wind, soaring like a kite.

An umbrella amidst the golden sand and silvery sea,

the handiwork of Lu Ban, the patron saint of craftsmen and builders,

a floral umbrella, each layer delicately fashioned out of primordial gauze.

\*

An oil painting the elevated bamboo houses, mysterious, simple yet beautiful.

The mysterious Kunshen Maiden,

has come from the Winter Solstice of 1900 all the way to the Birth of Spring, 37  
years later;

a scrap book folded up like so many waves;

the Southern Despot a lost traveling trader;

the Lanhai passing through on an exploratory journey.

Elevated bamboo houses arranged on the shoal like a star-filled sky,

a marvelous splendor an ordinary fragrance.

When a typhoon is about to appear around the time of the Summer Solstice the  
rain is the first to know.

Waisanding,

that old bamboo house, number 037.

I am the Merman;

you are Black Bow, as the brave young boy;

he is the time traveler.

A story Blacky.

Black Bow, and the Kunshen Maiden

go north and rest at Blacky's native place I go east to usher in the rising sun.

Budai Dongshi Waisanding, an offshore shoal,

and the Haomeiliao Lagoon.

Number 037 has been handed down by the fishing people for generations;

the ancient Ferryman, today's master mariner,

the Lighthouse Keeper looking out for the fishing people.

The remarkable elevated Bamboo House,

a crisscrossing, supernatural structure of old,

the internet of yesteryear;

the brilliantly spinning Wind Porch.

333 homes,

the houses of the water,

the houses of the wind.

On the high seas there is a place where a kettleful of golden sand

rests on top of the water like some fragrant cloud or a jeweled canopy,

like a great umbrella protecting the fishing people of the western coast,

guarding that small and simple harbor below some distant lighthouse.

Sea • tide • fishermen • rising and falling waves and boats,

at times becoming grounded in the shallows of the shoal under the moonlight.

On this shoal of golden sand and silvery sea there is a red sun

that shines on the elevated Bamboo House, number 037.

In 1977 all the elevated houses made of black bamboo were dismantled,

and the bamboo was used to make oyster racks.

A wave-breaking boat pulls out of a small harbor and heads towards the high seas,

rapidly crossing the undulating waves.

During the sultry heat of July

some businessmen set their sights on the western coastline.

It's said that way back in 1887 a leviathan flew here from the ancient northern sea,



beyond the pale of civilization;  
tonight a roc leaps over that silvery candle in the sky;  
at that time the long and slender Kunshen  
was a stunning maiden.

See that Oyster Monger at the harbor;  
the Fisher-woman content, endowed with foresight;  
businessman keen for a profit and thieves passengers on the pleasure boats;  
the Itinerant Poet and the Novelist living in a houseboat;  
punters; clam pickers;  
and Grandma of the Night, so fond of traipsing under the moonlight.  
The Merman searches for the Wind-settling Pearl endowed with the ability to  
control the moods of the sea.  
Grandma of the Night searches for an ancient, non-directional compass,  
forever oriented, transcending the wheel of time.  
See that farmer's almanac predicting the rise and fall of the tide.

## Chapter XV

### The Fragrant Sea at the Birth of Summer

Anchors away! All aboard!

Ah, young man never trust the wind  
during the Birth of Summer.<sup>26</sup>

See that sea of fragrant water,  
having already filled the pellucid pot of heaven and earth.  
See that charming moon, darting out from behind the peaks of the rain clouds;  
see that wish-fulfilling tree,  
leisurely swallowing up and spitting out the mist-shrouded primeval forest.  
A thousand rivers and streams converge on the miraculous vast sea.  
You, forever fond of importing your deepest thoughts into that dreamlike sea,  
hoping they will join together with my heart in a dream.  
On that day, you stood on the elevated walkway observing that shriveled rose off in  
the distance,  
a fragrant shoulder supporting the water-sky and flying mist,  
burned red by the fiery sun,  
the moisture within instantly penetrating those 84,000 pores.  
Suddenly, an easterly wind brings in news of the arrival of the Spring Equinox,  
gust by gust, a sweet fragrance pours over you, the lovely Kunshen.

You say that it was my bright and piercing gaze  
that drew in your affectionate eyes;  
you say that it was my love that secured your affection,  
layer upon layer,  
like the snow-white surf surging out of the azure sea;  
like the swelling waters rising up  
in that deep ocean trench;  
like ripples in a dream,

---

26. The 7th of the 24 two-week periods in the Chinese lunar calendar, approximately May 5th to May 20th in the Gregorian calendar.

endlessly rolling on.

All of a sudden, a wind from the south stirs the sand,  
a heavy fog envelops the wind-rain bridge on the other shore.  
A realm of golden sand and silvery sea, the birthmark  
of the Taiwan Strait.

You, the lovely Kunshen, swinging like a pendulum,  
using all your might  
to make your way into my dream the Merman's dream...

\*

"I trust you are well. Here the temperature is slowly rising.

The cabbage growing on the roadside can't wait for news of spring.

A vast sea of flowers is already covering the top of the mountain; quite pretty.

In the morning and evening it's about ten degrees centigrade,  
but the midday sun scorches your head.

The temperature difference is about 20 degrees.

Come to think of it, it's rather like summer and winter in our realm of golden  
sand and silvery sea..."

"In the autumn I will probably proceed to some other city,  
and am wondering if I should first visit the shoal.

At present you must be extremely busy with the spring planting,  
and I know that you always make extensive preparations.

In the midst of working so hard  
please remember to get some rest and recreation.

The weather is getting hotter, and the difference in temperature between night  
and day is getting greater.

Eat well,

take care of your health.

Wish you all the best.

While watching the sunset

I think about watching the sea with you.

Black Bow, March 23, 2007, at a place of pristine waters.”

Several white clouds drift over the blue sea,  
a whale and a leviathan coursing below.

## Chapter XVI

### Grandpa as a Youth at House Number 037

The wind prevents the boats from sailing a level course,  
the leaping waves stir up the tranquil sea,  
watercraft heaving and whirling all about.  
A front arrives;  
today, bright and early, a big thundershower falls on the shoal,  
the womenfolk set up scores of barrels to collect that gift from heaven.

Tonight, a black bat unfurls its glossy wings,  
tightly covering up a dark subterranean current.  
Suddenly, thunder and lightning break loose,  
in a moment a boat comes forth against the current from some deep place in the sea,  
the Old Fisherman's Wind Pavilion, thinking to turn itself into a great roc.  
Dream a dream within a dream,  
always for that Grandma of the Night, that mysterious shamaness.  
See that dormant volcano in the deep sea,  
sealed up—I know not when—by the icy kiss of a mysterious flaming phoenix.  
The volcano suddenly erupts,  
submerging the silent memory in a dream,  
rekindling that long-lost love story.  
See that shamaness as a young girl, alone in the first watch of the night,  
enjoying a youthful dream of unlimited joy,  
ever rebroadcasting one beautiful image after the next  
in the sea of consciousness.  
At that time, the Old Fisherman as a youth,  
was drawn in by her expression  
one mysterious night.  
On that night he lightly kissed the beautiful maiden,

bearing out the wonder of affection in the nightly dream of the maiden.  
On that night the lighthouse off Dongshi Harbor was besieged by a mass of fog,  
fearsome waves and wind.  
See the Wind Pavilion tossed about by raging waves and force-9 gales.  
On that night the maiden had a strange dream  
about weaving a story,  
afterwards placing her thoughts  
in an ancient glacial valley,  
and transforming her own frozen mind into the image of a net inside a living pearl.  
Ever since, the genetic element of her past lives continually changes in her nightly  
dreams.

The silvery sea. Tonight the moon emits a strange sort of purple light;  
powered by the wind, the sand waves, delicate and geometric, flow through the  
night.  
The leviathan has a colorful countenance;  
in addition to blue, jade, green, and green-blue, there is also purple.  
The fishing women here have exceptionally nimble toes;  
in their dreams they deeply feel  
how every night the mysterious hourglass leads the wind-blown sand into the sea,  
imperceptibly shifting south.  
See the toes of those fishing women, daily worn rough and thick by the shifting  
sands;  
see that pair of feet leaving impressions in the sand and water, following the lines  
of the wind and waves.  
All at once, in the sky reflected on the water, she sees all things going in reverse;  
sees Grandpa as a youth living at house 037;  
everything that he has experienced growing up on this body of water appears  
before her eyes.  
Thereupon, a leviathan turns into a roc and flies up to the heavens.

It's the former youth who leaves the past on the tidal flat of yesterday;  
it's the youth of the future who stores present memories in an eternal star of the future.

Riding the spring sunlight, a cool easterly wind ascends the peaks of the waves;  
*Time Inn*, like fan-shaped snowflakes rushing towards a tower in the fog;  
the *Boathouse*, forever fond of lingering in the dreamlike water-sky;  
at dusk Evening Red stirs up wave after whirling wave.

See that spindrift in riotous profusion gyrating on the surface of the sea;  
streaming light dyed in various colors courses on the level surface of the water;  
the pungent salty taste gradually soaks into the tip of Black Bow's tongue;  
a type of very dense water spirit  
jogs in the 48,000 pores of her body.

It was that sort of evening,  
when on the high seas there appeared a skylight, bright and effulgent.  
There was no blowing wind,  
no lingering images,  
no dance costume of the clouds,  
no pilgrimage of the rain,  
no Southern Heavenly Gate, the concourse of the gods.  
It was a highly peculiar sort of celestial phenomenon,  
just like a fabulous net mounted inside a transparent pearl;  
beyond description...

## Chapter XVII

### Blacky's Sonata on the Sea

The lovely Waisanding shoal, a golden pond lily drifting in the Taiwan Strait,  
a forgotten corner of the Pacific Ocean.

See that humid body of water raising up a magical lotus world of water and sand.

Crossing the swarthy fishermen go back and forth.

From behind the water curtain there has wafted out—I know not when—what  
appears to be a gilded fog,

but turns out to be grains of sand leaping in the wind.

See that foam churned up in the tidal flats,

waves and billows throwing forth bubbles in reckless abandon.

Off the veranda of the elevated Bamboo House is a mysterious gallery road  
and a lotus cave fashioned by the retreating tide;

troops of adorable water fairies recline in the flowing golden sand,

fluttering on the distant horizon in the reddish glow of the declining sun.

See that orb of the setting sun, already passed over the ends of the long veranda  
attached to the elevated Bamboo House,

moonlight dancing wildly under the elevated walkway, raising up the silvery white  
surf.

Sitting on the deck chair you once sat on, I pick up a button which fell from the  
middle of your shirt.

On that day you were wearing a snow-white skirt set with a red-green floral pattern.

On that night, as the wavy moonlight flashed on your deep red lips,

“When we are apart in the future, the distance between us will be only one  
second.”

Thereupon, I lightly imprint my magical fingerprint between your eyebrows;  
instantly, you open your ebullient, roselike eyes,

casting your gaze upwards to the glittering stars of the Milky Way.

This sort of love; true, eternal, reliable.



I once content to drift about on the high seas, am now reined in by that expression of pure love in your eyes.

You are my Kunshen Maiden, lovely and eternal;

I am the Merman, your eternal love in the middle of the sea.

Today an 80-year-old woman from Dongshi Harbor skilled in the technique of face-threading<sup>27</sup>

has arrived at the elevated Bamboo House

to give a beauty treatment to the young fishing women.

That night there arrives a mysterious guest the Merman stays the night;

silently departing in the early morning,

he leaves behind a luminescent pearl for the Fisher-woman.

In the early summer on this body of water

Black Bow carves into her boat memories of the past.

In this lotus world of water and sand

there is a strange sea creature which imbibes the energy of the sun.

Today there is a high pressure system swirling overhead,

slowly turning into a slightly cool easterly wind.

Black Bow thinks about

how thoughtful and caring the Merman is.

The Fisher-woman, content with her lot, places all of the Merman's love and affection

in an unlocked bamboo tube

and stores it under that long canopy bed...

Off in the distance, a wave pursues the declining rays of the sun,  
a ruddered roulette wheel spins the water-sky beneath the moonlight.

Standing on the pure green deck, Black Bow greets the starry sky suffused with purple.

It's said that in addition to "Ocean Drifter,"

I'm also known as the "Traveler on the Horizon."

---

27. Also known as "epilation," this is a traditional Asian technique for removing unwanted hair by using a twisted cotton thread to pluck out hair at the follicle level.

See that boat underneath the moonlight, stroking the ocean's belly;  
see those fish in the starry night, so fond of knocking against one another  
in that body of water.

It's said that another typhoon is on the way.

The Fisher-woman stands on the elevated walkway and prays for the safety of the  
fishermen far out at sea,  
as Black Bow, lonely yet dear,  
performs a tune on the guitar's seventh string,  
a sentiment so full that it couldn't be dampened even by a typhoon packing force-13  
winds.

Clouds floats by dropping rain on the water;  
when the last glimmer of moonlight disappears between the clouds,  
a damp fresco hangs on the wall of flowing tears on Evening Red;  
a black silence all about;  
only the Sea God dares to stir.

Amidst the enveloping darkness there suddenly appears  
a pair of mythical creatures locked in battle, bellowing out  
in thundering voices from deep within the darkness;  
earth shakes jolting this deep body of water.

## Chapter XVIII

### The Song of the Sea

Pacific Ocean western edge.

The Wengangdui Lighthouse built in 1914  
to prevent ships from grounding on the shoal,  
is visible up to 14.3 kilometers away.

A youth at the beginning of summer putting sail to the southerly wind,  
Black Bow reclines, alone on Evening Red,  
dreaming of a high-sea adventure with the Merman to some marvelous, distant sea.  
The lovely Kunshen snorkels in the moon-drenched sea, singing a song.  
Yesterday at dusk, dragging behind, the long tail of the declining sun  
swept over this inconceivable channel, so deep;  
glimmering lights of bamboo rafts scattered across this sparse body of water.  
Amidst the train of thought, there emerges an image from 1937.  
At that time a traveling peddler was going around with a theatrical company;  
that blazing thing in the sky at the beginning of summer  
was not the fiery sun,  
but rather your lovely red dress dancing in the azure center of the water.  
At that time the glow of the setting sun painted a red arrow on the pure blue sky,  
going directly to where you were standing on the water.  
See your cheeks, so clear and bright;  
off in the distance the gorgeous Wengangdui Lighthouse casts about its light,  
guiding the lovers' ships safely back to harbor.

In 1961  
a person endowed with foresight into the weather came to Waisanding,  
that off-shore shoal in the Taiwan Strait,  
to survey the wind and temperature,  
as well as the movement of the sand.

At that time there were still 333 families living on the shoal, nearly a thousand people in all.

The Old Fisherman with his Wind Pavilion also attended the gathering held at that time.

In those days the shoal had a general store, a pharmacy, and even a noodle vender.

An islet of a thousand hectares,

some 13 kilometers from north to south;

everywhere sweet springs gushing up from within the golden sands.

This shoal was discovered by fishermen in 1911.

In 1901 there were three small, round, primeval images on the southern end of the islet,

Formosa's largest off-shore shoal, moving and mysterious.

A man stout as a bow;

in the glow of dusk the Merman transforms into a fire-red sacred dragon.

The Traveler on the Horizon, piloting the boats 080 and 1601,

a pair of silver shuttles crossing over the umbilical cord of a super nova,

enters a primeval glacier in the Milky Way,

and from a magical treasure-cauldron

pulls out an eternal ember.

At the same time, the lovely Kunshen, piloting the Fog Maiden,

passes under a rainbow springing up from a magical waterfall,

and retrieves the Wind-settling Pearl sought by the Merman

in the boundless sea, unfolding on a magnificent scale.

Rising at the break of day,

Black Bow places her ten toes into that wet liquid,

deeply experiencing a different sort of sensory perception,

wondering:

"Is the movement of this great body of water both permanent and impermanent?"

It dawns on her: "The bubbles in the this great body of water are neither existent nor non-existent;

the waves in this great body of water are neither momentary nor eternal;  
yet, the flying mist in this great body of water  
is permeated with the inspired dreams of the fishing people living on this shoal.”  
The Merman once said to Black Bow:  
“This great body of water is a heavenly pond dreamed up by the lovely Kunshen Maiden.”

Today the wind and waves pick up momentum;  
the Fisher-woman dutifully  
brings her palms together in front of her chest, offers incense, and beseeches the Sea God  
to guide all the fishing boats safely back to shore tonight.  
All at once, a rosy cloud sitting in the sky shrouds the sea for three thousand li;  
responding to the call of the leviathan,  
a roc comes from beyond the heavens to dispel the wind and calm the waves.  
Throughout this boundless body of water  
can be found the subtle impressions left behind by the lovely leviathan.  
The Merman says:

“The ocean is the storehouse of the waters,  
rivers and streams are its means of conveyance;  
the waves piled high are the spinning wind-wheel bringing about transformation;  
carried inside the ardent waves are all those time travelers vying to get ahead.”  
See those wings of the roc, spreading over the coastal harbors of Dongshi and Budai;  
see those wings of the roc, like an open umbrella blocking the high winds,  
protecting the fishing ports of Formosa.

The Merman says:  
“This Taiwan Strait has more amazing stories than could ever be told;  
such as the many stories of Kunshen being reborn in a dream,  
and then transforming into something else...”

The Merman wants Black Bow to take complete notes  
for the sake of the lovely Fisher-woman.

## Chapter XIX

### North Kunshen, Changing Position, Rebirth

These golden sands and silvery sea are the navel of the Taiwan Strait;  
the propped up umbrella is Kunshen's northern manifestation;  
the mysterious blue sea is filled with amazingly clear green water;  
each grain of golden sand sings a song,  
a sailors' song about a small silver boat drifting in the moonlight.  
The Ferryman makes a pair of oars capable of measuring the height and circumference  
of the waves,  
conforming to the disposition of the water in all directions.  
Upsurge inside wave   wave inside upsurge,  
billow amidst wave   wave amidst billow,  
boat paddles oar   oar paddles boat,  
sail moves wind   wind moves sail.

A dragon   bounded by an umbrella,  
a leviathan   sealed within a circle enclosing three dots.  
That night the Ferryman dreamed of being embraced by a vast expanse of water,  
gracefully floating about in a sea of supple clouds,  
when suddenly a waterspout set off the latent energy of the sea.  
Wave colliding with billow,  
sending the tide off course.  
Foam in the sea   suddenly appearing, only to vanish;  
vaporized, rising up again   leaving behind nary a trace.  
Forthwith, resembling a broken mirror, the Taiwan Strait  
scatters pulverized bits of spindrift;  
a cloud rides the wind, turns into rain, and dives into the sea,  
exploring its deep secrets.  
The Old Fisherman's Wind Pavilion runs after the wild current, unruffled by the waves;

The Ferryman's Houseboat follows the mood of the water, unmoved by the billows.  
See the foam and bubbles seeking a foothold in the tidal flats caparisoned with  
spindrift;  
wind clusters around a cloud   cloud drives the wind,  
swiftly dashing about on the peaks of the waves.  
Yesterday at dusk there occurred in this body of water a peculiar astronomical  
phenomenon:  
In the western sky the fiery rays of the setting sun set the clouds ablaze;  
in the eastern sky the magical colors of a luminous cloud flashed like a spinning top.  
Suddenly, a flash of purple lightning fringed with blue illuminated this moody sea,  
as the heavenly drum beat out a song with its thundering voice;  
every wave, every upsurge,  
every raging billow, every excited wave  
on this entire sea, once so placid,  
all sang out that miraculous song of the sea,  
waking up all the fishing people in their elevated bamboo huts.

The mild water fondly strokes the curving hull of Evening Red,  
as Black Bow stirs the smooth liquid with that pair of rakish oars.  
A cool breeze slowly arrives   today the surface of the blue sea bright as a mirror;  
early morning, shoal enveloped in a thick layer of fog.  
Last night the Fisher-woman had a passionate dream,  
while the peach blossoms were in full bloom.  
She dreamed that she became an aurora swallowtail butterfly  
fluttering in front of the Merman's eyes.  
At that time the Merman's eyes had already turned into pearls,  
irradiating the butterfly,  
which then turned around and flew to the manor where Black Bow has arrived in the  
course of her wandering,  
where it sees the Merman cultivating the virgin soil.  
See that sheet of gold, grain dancing vigorously in the center.

From time to time, a heat wave comes through and tugs at the sprouts, making them flower and then drop,  
quivering branches shaking off flowers, only to bloom again.  
A purple-spotted butterfly silently perches  
on a blue patch on Black Bow's white skirt,  
whereupon a ray of light shines forth, a magical liquid crystal of 100,008,000 colors;  
the aurora swallowtail butterfly flies over the high seas to a mysterious harbor.

Tonight at the wharf  
the Shamaness prays for the safety of the fishermen at sea.  
See her wearing the wing of an invisible bat,  
dark green emerging from the middle of azure.  
The Shamaness asks me: "Are you looking for the Merman?"  
The Shamaness tells me to entertain myself with the moonlight,  
like a leviathan reclining obliquely on the bosom of the Taiwan Strait.  
See that bow of the new moon, discharging a shooting star, etching a line across the azure surface of the water,  
illuminating the remnants of the fishermen's dreams remaining in these waters.  
You, I, her, him, everybody;  
we are not the only drifters on the sea.  
See that tide moistening the golden sand.  
The Shamaness says:  
"Although you have turned into an aurora swallowtail butterfly,  
you still have to wait for a long time;  
for only when the Merman succeeds in finding the lost Wind-settling Pearl  
will it be possible for him to pacify this body of water,  
profess his love for you, and fulfill his affection for her.

The secret of love;  
it's all quite mysterious and incomprehensible;



even a shamaness is apt to lose something...”

Suddenly, the aurora swallowtail butterfly awakens from its dream, only to enter yet another dream of a dream;  
this time it dreams that it is a leviathan sauntering about in the depths of this great sea,  
as before, searching everywhere for the Merman’s footprints.

## Chapter XX

### Bubbles Arising on the Sea

Tonight the fishermen of Waisanding brought in a handsome catch,  
setting out at night, returning in the morning,  
each boat laden with fish.

Some visiting sport fishermen gifted several hundred fishing poles,  
the fisher-women busy fitting them with strings.

Several pieces of driftwood grounded on the beach,  
the fisher-women well know that they harbor a mysterious genetic element,  
primordial and indestructible.

Endless watery images on the sea-sky,  
duplicating clouds and seabirds in the sky.

A fish hawk searches for fish,  
fish chase after the Old Fisherman's bait,  
foam and bubbles, trained in appearing and vanishing;  
seafarers transform into characters in a play, creating unlimited imaginal space.  
At the beginning of summer, school upon school of a mysterious sort of fish appear  
each night;

every dusk the fishermen storm the beach and hold a sporting event.

See that fiery-red setting sun lighting up those 333 fishing boats;  
see that school of beautiful fish

playfully chasing one another in the twilight.

All over the Taiwan Strait

are found the marks carved into Black Bow's boat;  
the fishermen wield their oars with ease,

no fear whatsoever of the darkness, high winds, or surging tides,  
rustic mariners borrowing the strength of the sea.

On that night, 333 fishing lamps burn on the silvery sea surrounding the shoal,

in discourse with the stars in the Milky Way,  
a peculiar sort of interaction.  
Hear the beautiful song of the fishermen sung for the fish;  
see those silvery waves rolling up the moonlight,  
stringing it into a necklace of superb color as an offering to the Sea God.  
On that night, all the fishermen on those 333 boats dream of being tenderly  
embraced by the sea,  
wandering about unhurriedly in this genial body of water.  
All of a sudden, a great upsurge  
twists asunder the playground of the waves,  
rousing the fishermen from their sleep,  
forthwith taking up their oars, pulling in lightly, then pushing with all their might.  
Suddenly, the bubbling foam thrown up by the surging waves  
is permanently branded by the moonlight,  
instantly entering into eternity.  
As soon as the bubbling foam disappears  
a fisherman hears a thunderclap loud enough to rattle the heavens and shake the  
earth,  
an auditory impression which will last forever,  
following the flowing tides;  
he decides that today is a good day to try to catch that golden fish.

The first day of August, 2005; in a dream during the Great Heat<sup>28</sup> a premonition of  
an upcoming great assembly,  
dignified and ceremonious.  
A virtuous sage caringly reminds me  
to put some ease into my happy-but-brisk pace...  
A thought walks along the road,  
the mind lingers in some other frontier;  
an easy mastery of magical powers; a description of a most fine and delicate  
sentiment;

---

28. The 12th of the 24 two-week periods in the Chinese lunar calendar, approximately July 23 to August 7 in the Gregorian calendar.

yours, mine, hers, theirs.

Generations of eternal lovers

agreed to meet in this miraculous dream and make good their promises;  
all those sentiments ever peddled by anyone who has ever been in love,  
tonight they deliver the goods.

You love me I love you or she loves you;

whether or not it can be let go of is determined by the six senses—eyes, ears, nose,  
tongue, body, and mind.

You tell me in a dream:

“Tonight I really feel like crying;

an ancient and mysterious musical note,

forever lingering in the sea of consciousness, a dream within a dream within a  
dream;

driving it out, it doesn't go; calling it close it doesn't come.”

I want you to abandon those distorted views occluding your vision;

I want her to apply the lines of the churning waters to the space between her  
eyebrows.

I take both you and her to a crossroads, both imaginary and real,  
the liminal space between fantasy and reality;

it's sleeping, it's waking; the water and waves always converge in a dreamlike sea.

See that ardently revolving slipstream,

forming a series of black-hole twisters in the water-sky.

You are my dear Fisher-woman.

Last night I dreamed of hanging an imperishable lamp on the bow of a ship;  
at that time you had a transparent teardrop  
whirling in your eye.

She says that it's extremely attractive when I dance

using the water-flowers brought down by the oar and fallen inside the boat.

In a dream the three of us and all the rest

pilot a solitary boat over the cresting waves in hot pursuit of the setting sun.

You closely observe the direction of the wind  
and contemplate the subtle space which gives birth to the surf.  
She says that she sees an inconceivable form,  
a large wave dancing therein, filling the sky,  
an extremely odd dream.  
In the dream the others only happily smile at, you, her, and myself,  
without saying a word,  
as if we had all reverted to the primeval source of life,  
an easy mastery of magical powers   bluish-green stillness   a circle enclosing three  
dots.

## Chapter XXI

### Reminiscence of the Old Man of the Lighthouse —On the Frontier of a Dream

Rope-tied rafts, vine-bound boats,  
the seafarers, so fond of piloting their rafts on this body of water,  
bamboo baskets   wooden barrels.  
The Fisher-woman makes red turtle cakes<sup>29</sup> for the New Year celebrations,  
a red even brighter than the setting sun.  
The awning-spread boat has no sail;  
the Ferryman uses his two nimble hands to row it;  
whitecaps resembling snow lotuses;  
shuttlelike fish dart below the disk of the evening sun on the horizon,  
in an instant, entering into permanent storage  
in the multitude of ocean seals thrown up by the foam.  
Tonight a thousand sails race about on the Taiwan Strait,  
a contest to see who is first to fill the hull.  
On Time In the Lighthouse Keeper  
tells a story to his seven-year-old son  
about the previous generation on this mysterious body of water.  
It happened 37 years, 37 years, and 37 years ago;  
the Old Fisherman, then 73, exhorting his 37-year-old son on the Wind Pavilion;  
the 37-year-old father telling his seven-year-old son a story..

On that day, a young girl had come to these golden sands and silvery sea as a guest,  
and played house with another child  
all day long.  
That simple-hearted lovely girl  
brought a story for the little boy about an umbrella without a top.  
That night a thousand fishing boats dropped anchor in the shallows,

---

29. A round or oval pastry of glutinous rice stuffed with a sweet filling; associated with longevity and eaten during Chinese New Year and other special occasions.

as the mysterious Merman transformed into a fisherman in search of his lovely leviathan.

At that time there were seven large shoals in the Taiwan Strait, together forming an arched barrier off the coast.

The little girl says to the little boy:

“This strip of golden sand surrounded by a silvery sea is an ancient fishing village formed by the moonlight and the scales of the lovely leviathan; a century and a half ago it mysteriously disappeared, only to reappear a century and a half later, with the addition of a peak formed by the rays of the setting sun.”

From that time onwards, this golden offshore shoal has been subtly shifting southwards in the Taiwan Strait, like a crane emerging from its silver cage and turning around under the mysterious moonlight.

The little girl says to the little boy:

“You and I, both of us, are manifestations of the Merman and the leviathan; so we need to forever protect this shoal, this silvery sea.”

That night the little girl disappeared without a trace; the seven-year-old boy, now 93, has been looking for her ever since; the 93-year-old man again pulls out and ponders that dusty story from some 80 years ago.

\*

You are the little girl born in the old fishing village at the northern end of the shoal;

I am the visitor from the inconceivable Fragrant Ocean.<sup>30</sup>

Having followed a far-ranging fishing boat returning to this shoal, today I am your guest.

Fond of inviting me to play house,  
you ask me to play the role of the servant in the daytime,  
and to play the role of your master while dreaming at night.

---

30. The body of water surrounding Mt. Sumeru, the center of the world in Buddhist and Hindu cosmology.

You then ask me to play the role of the master in the daytime,  
and to play the role of your servant while dreaming at night.  
That day at dusk, together in the shrine room of the Shamaness,  
we see a golden phoenix flying about inside a blazing fire,  
a red miracle transforming into a golden, eminent being.  
The Shamaness tells us:  
“Tonight a leviathan will come floating out of the water and ponder the weather,  
providing the fishermen with advance knowledge of the summer typhoons.  
A merman will come in search of his beautiful lover,  
and give to her luminescent pearls, one after another...”

See those waves leaping in the distance,  
putting up layer upon layer of watery elevated walkways,  
lovely fish cavorting above.  
See those huge waves facing the sky in respectful salutation,  
as snow lotuses toss and tumble in the silvery sea,  
a mass of spotless white,  
water grappling with water,  
wind sparring with wind.  
Suddenly, heaven and earth are enveloped in a blinding darkness;  
Who could possibly quell the roar of this angry body of water?  
See that whiplike wave billows high as a mast,  
urgently pressing that subterranean stream,  
come from afar to carry out a nighttime raid on these golden sands and silvery sea,  
only to be swallowed whole by the leviathan.  
All at once, the water-sky turns placid,  
the upper reaches of the clouds appeased.  
See that timeless hourglass reclining on Kunshen's navel, ever flowing,  
thighs of snow-white surf tugging one another into a deep-blue channel.  
The Merman rolls along with the undulating mass of waves,  
a light breeze ruffles the hem of the lovely Kunshen's elegant dress,



exposing the toes of the lovely Fisher-woman.

Moist grains of sand soak your footprints;  
you invite me to put up for the night on this frontier of a dream,  
take a brief rest in the present moment,  
and listen deeply to the undulating tide,  
a subtle message from the depths of the sea,  
calling out to the errant rivers and streams  
to quickly return to the ocean depths.

## Chapter XXII

### The Mysterious Celestial Body in an Ancient Palace

Ah, roving sail ah, boat put to sea;  
oh, rowing, rowing sore hands gripping oars.  
Ah, you, reluctant to part eyes of affection;  
oh, such foolishness ever waiting expectantly under the moonlight.  
Ah, a goodbye kiss for that perpetual visitor;  
oh, hoping, hoping silver wing becomes the garment of a butterfly.  
With thunder and lightning as bait a cloud hauls in the moonlight,  
thereupon turning into rain, plunging into the bosom of the sea.  
With the slipstream as bait the wind hauls in the rosy clouds,  
restoring the blue sky, draping a deep-green watery garment on the great sea.  
With Gliese<sup>31</sup> as bait, a mysterious celestial body  
turns the heavens, turns the Earth, turns the mountains, turns the seas, turns the  
prayer wheels;<sup>32</sup>  
one revolution takes 13 days.  
With Libra as bait, a huge supernova  
exerts its influence from some 20 light years away,  
passing through 193 trillion kilometers of pulse waves, then taking birth.  
See that great body of water with the force of the tide as bait,  
synchronizing its movement with that of the moon;  
see that old lighthouse with its lamp as bait,  
ushering back to harbor boat after boat laden with fish.

The Spring Equinox, a primordial rhythm beyond man's control;  
half day, half night;  
the transparent rays of sunlight never reach the treasure trove at the bottom of the  
sea;  
the glittering stars of the Milky Way reflected on the surface of the water,

---

31. A red dwarf star located in the constellation Libra, about 20 light years away from Earth.

32. A cylinder enclosing Buddhist mantras or scriptures, so as to generate blessings when spun. Also known as mani wheels, prayer wheels of all sizes are widely used in Tibetan Buddhism.

everywhere a beautiful image.

Today an entertainer has come from Budai  
along with his apprentice.

Inviting the Merman, the Fisher-woman, and Black Bow to be the audience,  
and five musicians to provide accompaniment,  
he sings in a high voice:

“An entertainer, just a form;

now a mandarin, now a slave.

Names and costumes change indeed;

in the end there's no difference between master and slave.”

Suddenly, on the elevated walkway

there appears a strange little girl, come from some distant place, wearing riding  
boots;

she says she has come to see the sea,

and that in the city people say:

“This umbrella is an ancient temple dropped into the Taiwan Strait three thousand  
years ago;

this shoal is a petrified leviathan from 300 million years ago,  
having floated to the surface nearly 300 years ago.”

The little girl in riding boots has come to find out for herself...

The rain was the first to know on the umbrella

there are golden grains of sand dancing mysteriously under the silvery moonlight.

Tonight the sea, a bright and effulgent sheet of brightness;

the fishermen place their boats in this cradle of happiness.

See that body of water, nerve cells throughout,

a beautiful and eternal image left behind on every spot touched by the moonlight;

see those thousand and one water fairies

speeding about on this dreamlike sea,

like a flash of purple lightning fringed with blue.

The Merman comes from beyond the sea, like a flying shuttle cutting across the  
wind-born waves.

Arriving at the golden sands and silvery sea of Waisanding,  
he announces to the lovely Kunshen Maiden  
that a tropical low-pressure system has formed on the distant ocean and is slowly  
turning into a typhoon;  
a vast, dense fog  
slowly swallows up wave upon wave of blue and roving green.  
Off in the distance, under the beautiful silvery moonlight,  
water walls go up,  
facing this sheet of subtly shifting golden sand and silvery sea,  
a wind estimated to be force 13.

Wind not arrived rain comes first  
to the elevated bamboo houses on the shoal.  
See that hanging water curtain dancing about,  
everywhere the beautiful image of the Fisher-woman,  
as moon, stars, and white clouds beat a hasty retreat;  
in the shallows, the fishermen drop their anchors deep.  
In the Taiwan Strait the swelling tide stretches its muscles,  
surging waves in the Pacific reveal their irresistible force.  
The Old Fisherman pilots his Wind Pavilion  
across the supernatural dance attire raised up by this body of boiling water,  
whitecaps flying up and sliding off his shoulders,  
bubbles and foam splashing out a virtual landscape,  
existing for but a moment,  
yet striving to transform the moment into eternity.  
Center stage, dark nine-level waves combine and rapidly spin,  
in a moment turning into a swirling vortex;  
off to one side, a long wave careens with great speed,  
colliding with billows, instantly swallowing them whole.  
On the other side, the tide swiftly changes gears,  
slamming on the brakes;

tempestuous waves surging sporadically.

Tonight this ardent body of water imprints the elevated bamboo houses  
with the canopy of the heavens, boundless, untrammelled.

## Chapter XXIII

### The Ninth Wharf of the Sealed Dream

In the Taiwan Strait  
there is a tiny, shifting sandbar.  
One time, the fishermen put up a temporary village near the shallows of the raft  
bay;  
within a year there were 333 elevated bamboo houses.  
Sometimes the fishing people hang up lanterns and silk festoons on these golden  
sands amidst the silvery sea,  
the red glow blanketing the entire shoal.  
That night, in the wisteria house of the Fisher-woman, the Merman delivered a pot  
of red copper  
filled with the purple tea brought by Black Bow,  
a thick aroma wafting out of a purple sand teapot.  
See that backlit module illuminated by the rays of the declining sun,  
making a rubbing of the glistening elevated walkway beyond the window,  
showing off its diamondlike beauty.  
An overturned hourglass seals the dream of the Peach Blossom Sister;  
she can neither go from the present into the past,  
nor from the present into the future;  
all that remains is to attend to the present,  
and live in harmony with the Fisher-woman, content with her lot,  
until the naked stars fill the empty sky.

In the Milky Way a mysterious digital code  
changes as soon as it's set;  
a happy sort of ease,  
comes, goes, and comes again.  
In the bright and clear moonlight

Kunshen covers a fantastic color with her naked body,  
a group of marvelous love notes silently resets the code,  
infusing it with an entirely new formula.  
The Merman says that tonight you will be the director, the Fisher-woman will hold  
the mirror,  
and that the Peach Blossom Sister and the Shamaness will perform;  
it will be a time to remember.  
See that ancient umbilical cord of causes and conditions,  
for thousands of years entangling us together.  
It was on that night that you again kissed me indistinctly.  
See that tiny palace lantern hanging from the central beam in the wisteria house;  
the red orb of the sun slowly appears  
above the slick elevated walkway outside the Bamboo House,  
a few patches of early-morning light penetrate the thick sea fog.  
Outside the window, sand races wildly up an umbrella-shaped dune;  
off in the distance drifting foam leaps about.  
It was on that night that I carelessly let a bead of sweat drop from my fingertip,  
scalding that lovely, fiery-red stamen inside your water bottle;  
In an instant, remembering that primordial, ancient heaven.

On the Taiwan Strait, the sea beyond the sea,  
333 elevated bamboo houses, marvelous to see;  
a mighty apricot-colored flag  
points towards Formosa, that beautiful treasure island off in the distance.  
Kunshen dives into the water to bathe,  
sending soothing waves over your entire body,  
a warm current soaking into your 84,000 pores,  
like last night's spring tide pouring over Kunshen's body,  
hypnotic,  
ushering you off to the land of dreams.  
Hear that soothing sound of the waves, beautiful and pensive.

Next to your ear, I whisper an ancient story about the seafarers,  
but in a dream you weave a new dreamscape.  
See you fast asleep, light smile peeking out from one side.  
I once told you  
that when you awake you will discover that  
you have changed from a little girl  
into a charming and graceful maiden.

As a little girl you were fond of feigning tears,  
and then teasing me about not knowing what to do;  
you said that a little boy shouldn't cry,  
and that tears should not be shed lightly,  
for each tear turns into a pearl.  
Thus, even to this day, I never let a single tear leave my eyes...  
These true stories are stored in the sea of childhood memories,  
not in some fabricated fantasy.  
Today the seawater bright, silent, colorless;  
today the sand has a transparent, golden appearance,  
in the early light, each grain reflecting the others.  
See that umbrella propping up the sky;  
see that shoal in a sea of dreams.  
You, the lovely Kunshen,  
a little girl fond of reclining on this body of water,  
waking up as a celestial maiden.

Last night, the tide was tugged by some mysterious force,  
the orb of the moon high in the heavens, so clear, so transparent, so pure.  
At that time, in a beautiful dream,  
you sealed my soul with your lips.  
See that hourglass, ageless, indestructible,  
eternally springing forth from your navel.



Hear those billows wildly whirling,  
performing their tempestuous dance on your body.  
You are my only harbor;  
it was in the past in a far-off dream,  
Harbor Number Nine, once sealed off.  
Kunshen Kunshen you are my eternal and lovely Fisher-woman,  
I wait,  
forever wait for you to awaken from your deep slumber.

## Chapter XXIV

### The Mysterious Eye of the Milky Way

It's said that a young maiden dreams of her lover in the form of a red ladybug;  
last night the Shamaness dreamed of chasing a flying ladybug,  
afterwards running into Black Bow and I, the Merman.  
See that white cloud leisurely drifting in between the blue firmament and the deep-green surface of the water.

As the fiery-red sun peeks out through the Wind Porch,  
the Fisher-woman hangs an ancient bronze mirror behind the elevated Bamboo House;  
struck by a ray of sunlight, the mirror produces a mysterious channel leading out to the high sea.

At the break of day 333 fishing boats head out to sea,  
as the fisher-women waves from atop the umbrella-like shoal.  
Today the sea is unusually serene;  
the spotlessly white surf clusters around boats yellowed with age,  
as the Old Fisherman floats about in his Wind Pavilion,  
and the Ferryman pilots his Houseboat, bringing the Peach Blossom Sister to visit the Fisher-woman.

She brings with her wild lilies about to bud,  
moist veins briskly flowing across the petals,  
bursting forth like the first rays of the sun.  
The Peach Blossom Sister presses the pause button,  
preserving their fresh scarlet color.  
Disembarking, she strides into the Bamboo House,  
lilies in hand, fresh and transparent as life itself;  
two young maidens, sentiment spreading.

The Peach Blossom Sister tells the Fisher-woman:

“Last night in Budai the Oyster Monger told me an incredible story;  
afterwards, she sealed it inside a time capsule  
and asked me not to tell it to anyone,  
for it is an old story about a young girl’s first love.  
She then told me that in the upper cabinet of the canopy bed there is a bottle of  
pure water,  
with a luminescent pearl inside.”  
Just then, I, the Merman, along with Black Bow and the Shamaness of Kouhu,  
arrive and announce our presence.  
From daybreak to dusk, the five of us chat in the elevated Bamboo House,  
whereupon a huge setting sun appears over the elevated walkway,  
the distant magical eye of this body of water,  
gazing, as it were, at the Fisher-woman through the lapis lazuli window.  
The Fisher-woman boils some congee and makes some good tea,  
inviting us to eat before going out to observe the sky.  
Soon afterwards,  
Oh outside, the stars already arrayed on the chess board of the Milky Way,  
a silvery screen hung on the water-sky.

Today the Taiwan Strait is calm and tranquil;  
colorful clouds paint a portrait of the Sea God;  
a group of young fisher-women happily splash about in the shallows;  
a water fairy briskly flitters all about;  
fishermen in their boats and rafts lulled to sleep by the sea’s gentle lullaby.  
Today the sea is an endless stretch of water;  
the fisher-women listen to the song of the sea, rapt in attention,  
as you, the lovely Kunshen Maiden,  
are silently clothed by the slowly rising tide.

You, a pure and faultless beauty of golden hue,  
your bright angelic form restored by each retreating tide.

See the mudskippers darting in and out of their watery holes;  
see the portals of the hermit crabs dug into the dunes;  
see your sleeve of water and sand wafting in the soft southerly wind.  
The Fisher-woman's toes penetrate the moist sand dune,  
as a quivering wave sends up a thick, wet fog,  
shrouding a boat reclining on the slick golden sand.  
In the distant tidal flats, whitecaps shoot up one after another,  
tide arrives spindrift gently lifts up the reclining boats,  
silently sending them on their way..  
See that golden world, a shoal surrounded by the silvery sea;  
your soft, supple body trembles;  
it's that harbor where the drifting boat lays down,  
wave after wave of rolling sand streaming over your chest,  
your whole body made moist and glossy by the thick mist.  
Off in the distance, the mirrorlike surface of the water  
has already been draped with a thin rosy cloud—I know not when.

The earliest record of the shoal  
goes back to the Birth of Summer, 1897.  
At that time, I saw the youth of the future known as Azu  
scouring the rising and ebbing tide for a mythical sea creature.  
At dusk there came floating in from some distant sea a mysterious piece of  
petrified wood.  
Having stood it up on end, Azu, that youth of the future,  
attached a mighty flag  
to guide the passing ships, the precursor of the lighthouse.

## Chapter XXV

### 1974—The Legend of the Quasar

1900, Winter Solstice Azu, the youth of the future.  
333 families in elevated bamboo houses  
stuff bright-red dumplings;  
the fisher-folk pray for longevity;  
a canopy suspended on bamboo poles, a golden lotus on the sea,  
a pond lily floating in the water.  
The Wind Porch reveals a bare bamboo pole;  
tidal waters rise beneath the elevated walkway.  
The rain was the first to know that mysterious umbrella with 28 bows for ribs,  
leading the grains of golden sand in elated song and dance as the tide recedes.  
The cold north wind, 13 degrees Celsius, lovingly caresses your immaculate form,  
as the mild waters rinse over your arched body,  
at daybreak embellished by the rising sun,  
at dusk adorned by the sunset.  
Your true color, so bright and pure;  
your graceful bearing so marvelous to behold;  
at times, reclining on the Taiwan Strait waiting for me, the Merman, to return and  
embrace you;  
at times, pretending to be mesmerized by this body of water,  
dreaming of searching for me  
the Ocean Drifter, the Traveler on the Horizon.  
See that golden world of silvery sea, a hermit crab in each hole in the sand,  
changing shells once a year.  
The rain is the first to know  
See that mysterious umbrella with 28 bows for ribs,  
shifting position in response to the currents of the sea.

1937, Birth of Winter    Azu, the youth of the future, reviews a dream he had as a boy in 1937

about a mysterious maiden voyage;

a pair of affectionate eyes in the misty moonlight

recording this inconceivable impression.

Mountainous waves furiously compose a rhapsody,

bantering billows spin out a symphony.

A rip-tide arrives    boats and rafts like migratory birds in winter  
stop to rest their wings on this friendly shoal.

You, the Kunshen Maiden, sweeping waves for eyebrows,

every dusk, hauling in the rays of the setting sun

with the arching waves as your hook.

You are the tutelary deity of this fishing village floating on the Taiwan Strait;

I am the Merman, the one you forever wait for.

Tonight, on the boundless sea,

I again rest next to your body.

1974, the Great Heat.

Black Bow again returns to these golden sands and silvery sea,

this world of color in a fantasy of summer.

A pair of discerning eyes marvelously contacts this glistening body;

in a moment, this golden leaf is covered by the azure water-sky,

sprout upon sprout bursts open on a distant spot illuminated by a pure cyan light.

See that old man gazing at the sea from the ancient fishing village,

spinning out false impressions in a dream,

waking up and carelessly taking them for reality.

See that Fish Monger at Budai Harbor,

a recurring memory

forever floating about in the sea of consciousness, in the ancient scroll of this golden world.

In the dark of night, an exploding pit suddenly swallows the shell of heaven and earth;

instantly, a red light inside a blaze of red,  
a quasar born of ten trillion grains of sand from beyond time and space,  
floats in from beyond the heavens.  
In the upper clouds a low-pressure system forms heat convection,  
generating a wide array of powerful waves;  
a deep sea current circulates around these golden sands and silvery sea,  
protecting you, the lovely Kunshen.

Tonight, within the depths of the undercurrent,  
an iceberg from the polar regions emits a blue flame.  
In a moment, a trench appears on the seabed below the Taiwan Strait,  
a bottomless pit connected to a whirlpool;  
instantly, the elevated walkway becomes a suspended waterbed,  
the elevated bamboo houses become drifting boats;  
333 boats and rafts form a drifting shore.  
The rain was the first to know this mysterious umbrella of 28 bows,  
like the tutelary deities of the 28 constellations,  
collectively using their incomparable power  
to tame the raging billows and monstrous waves.  
There suddenly appears what looks to be an overturned hourglass  
being swirled around the vast emptiness of the sea.  
See those peaks of the waves the Wind Pavilion changing direction,  
the Old Fisherman on the bow, staring out into the distance,  
wanting Azu, the youth of the future, to clearly see the circumstances of the past.  
In his Houseboat, the Ferryman tells Azu, the youth of the future:  
“In the life of a real fisherman  
time is never wasted;  
time waits for no one;  
they have no need of pity; no need to be saved by others...”

## Chapter XXVI

### The Weeping Pearl

In the Taiwan Strait, the sea beyond the sea,  
at a place 13 nautical miles off the coast lies the dream of the fishing people.  
On that night, a great tempest descends upon the shoal;  
all 333 elevated bamboo houses barely able to hold their ground;  
wave upon white wave submerges the elevated walkway;  
billow upon towering billow inundates the Wind Porch.  
Suddenly, the vast sea is filled with a heavenly sign;  
all the boats are carried out to sea.  
At once, the Merman raises up that magical umbrella with 28 bows  
and uses it to block the passage of the boats  
and guide them back to the shoal surrounded by the silvery sea.

Black Bow black bow.

The Merman and Kunshen yearn for each other day and night;  
one a maiden, innocent and pure,  
one offering tear-born pearls to the leader of the itinerant peddlers.  
Today the vitality of the morning sun reinvigorates the golden shoal.  
In the delicate first rays of light  
water fairies lightly stroke the golden sand;  
brilliantly colored rays of light seep into the sea to the south;  
the lovely Kunshen absorbs the moisture dyed with sunlight;  
the Merman announces that an auspicious sign came floating in last night on the  
moonlight, portending peace and prosperity.

Black Bow black bow.

In the remote past,  
on this body of water, a leviathan turned into a roc and flew high up into the  
heavens;



at the beginning of the age of mystery, a roc plunged into this body of water and  
became a leviathan,

come to watch over the simple fishing folk of the Taiwan Strait.

Black Bow black bow.

In the remote past,

on this body of water, the Merman brought to perfection the Wind-settling Pearl;

at the beginning of the age of mystery,

the Merman carelessly lost the Wind-settling Pearl,

and has been searching for it ever since.

At that time, the setting sun left a beautiful red seal for the Merman and Kunshen,  
with the bright moonlight as witness.

You are a pair of eternal lovers,

companions on the mountain of the spirit, come from beyond time and space.

Kunshen, watching over the fishing people of the Taiwan Strait,

the Merman wanders to the ends of this body of water in his bid to protect you.

See that umbrella of 28 bows, first known by the rain,

harboring the mysterious elements of 28 constellations,

bringing eternal felicity to the fishing people of this coast...

It's said that the vast, boundless sea

is the collective dream of the entire human race.

A skiff on the sea, at times charging over the peaks of the waves;

at times drawn into their troughs,

the collective dream, as it were, of the entire human race;

at times arriving then leaving, in the space in between birth and death.

A bevy of simple fishermen in the season of the south wind

leisurely row their boats across a sea of deep waves,

under a placid, bright, and effulgent sky.

All of a sudden, there appears a medley of clear-air turbulence;

wind awakens, water rises.

Boat crossing waves, each billow higher than the last;

raft charging billows, each surge broader than the last.  
A school of sauntering fish, suddenly perplexed,  
having lost their bearings.  
The wandering Merman suddenly dizzy;  
having forgotten the rendezvous arranged with his lover,  
he steps into a new dream.

Yesterday the billowing waves swallowed the final rays of the sun, waiting until  
dawn to spit them out.  
Today the waves folded up and tucked away the first rays of the sun,  
only at dusk releasing them in a burst of color.  
See those perpendicular rays of light at high noon,  
pulverized by the surging surf.  
Black Bow uses a magical mariner's knife to carve a deep water-mark,  
whereupon the surface of the water is split by the red light of Evening Red,  
drawing in a cloud on the horizon,  
causing it to burst into flames in the western sky.  
See that red-dyed surf, affectionately stroking Kunshen's shoulders.  
It's the longing I, the Merman, have for you,  
those watery wings, that make the tide rise in this vast body of water.  
You say that today a boat sailing the high seas has changed its helmsman,  
and that I should go and watch over it,  
so that it doesn't get lost and go off course on this body of water.  
See those lines on the distant water, quickly repositioning.  
In the Taiwan Strait, the undercurrent  
searches for that new helmsman, unfamiliar with the navigation channels.

Who would have known that that deep-sea ship with the novice helmsman  
would run into a typhoon with a waterspout,  
accompanied by giant waves licking the sky,  
nothing but endless water.

See that body of water, suddenly seething and soaring;  
waterspout transforming into a giant vortex,  
then into a huge, black praying mantis,  
pounding against the boat of the novice helmsman.  
On that night, just as the captain of the ship began to give up hope of ever  
returning to port,  
the Merman rose up out of the water with a magical umbrella  
with 28 bows...

## Chapter XXVII

### **The Ancient Compass and the Hourglass in the Water**

Tonight on this sea beyond the sea  
boats and rafts, 333 in all, set out to challenge the sea.  
See that the Old Fisherman's Wind Pavilion going in reverse,  
sail emblazoned with the image of a jeweled moon palace,  
fighting against the boundless bounding waves;  
angry waves, long and twisting, whirling about,  
encouraging the Old Fisherman to seek in these mysterious waters  
yet more inspiration for writing the song of the sea.  
See that imaginal world in this body of water, representation of the ocean seal in  
thick array,  
impairing the Old Fisherman's sense of vision.  
The south wind at the height of summer saunters about in the glistening light  
riding the waves;  
up in the sky, a nebula joins the merriment,  
a distinguished gathering of heaven and earth.  
Suddenly, this body of water and sea  
sea and water,  
this great mass of foam and bubbles  
bubbles and foam,  
lets out an elated leap.  
In the east, the fiery orb of the sun  
spreads out that umbrella of the 28 rosy clouds of dawn,  
instantly lighting up the red clouds filling the sky,  
turning into a light garment of golden threads,  
covering the body of the lovely Kunshen Maiden.  
Such was the virgin charm of the shoal in 1901.

Today the lively sea appears bright and effulgent,  
like a jeweled mirror reflecting a tableau of 333 boats and rafts.  
See those 333 boats and rafts cutting across the interface between the shoal and the  
silvery sea;  
for a moment, a vast, thick fog smoke flowers whirling on the surface of the water.  
In this body of water a mysterious and beautiful fish—the name of which I know  
not—  
has made off with the Old Fisherman's fishing pole...  
Carrying the Peach Blossom Sister in his Houseboat,  
the Ferryman speeds out from Dongshi Harbor towards that magical offshore stage  
Kunshen.  
It's said that during the Summer Solstice there will be a typhoon.  
Bringing a dozen zongzi,<sup>33</sup> the Peach Blossom Sister,  
along with the Oyster Monger and the Shamaness,  
is coming to the shoal to meet the Fisher-woman, Black Bow, and myself, the  
Merman,  
to discuss a strategy for assisting the fisher-folk, those denizens of the coast.

High above the Taiwan Strait, a weather front is held up,  
roaring thunderclaps encamped on the western edge of the Pacific.  
Blacky summons down a volley of lightning bolts from within the dark ashen sky,  
flashing for an instant instantly flashing.  
See that sword of the curving waves,  
surging billows for arrows,  
discharged against boats and rafts,  
appearing and disappearing in the dark swirling waters.  
I, the Merman, refer not to the bright North Star for guidance;  
I say to the lovely Fisher-woman:  
"All Black Bow needs to do  
is leap up above all those waves and billows  
to get a glimpse of the true nature of this great body of water."

---

33. Glutinous rice mixed with chestnuts, etc.; steamed and served wrapped in large leaves.

See that foam vacillating on the peaks of the waves,  
a chance to make an eternal, unchanging snapshot of a moment in time;  
see those crowds of water fairies clambering over the surging waves,  
a chance to find a safe harbor in the midst of a momentary struggle.  
I, the Merman, am in possession of a non-magnetic, omnidirectional, ancient  
compass,  
thanks to which, ever since Pangu opened up the sky, I have never once gone off  
course on this inconceivable body of water.  
I say to the lovely Fisher-woman:  
“If only Black Bow could have more respect for this inconceivable body of water,  
recognize its watery nature,  
then she’d be able to understand why the seafarers are so in love with it.”  
See those waves and swells, composing a symphony for double winds,  
accompanying the song of the fishermen aboard their boats;  
see those boats clothed in a thin garment of water,  
breath filled with a thick, pulsating fog.

Black Bow pilots her Evening Red  
on this ardent body of water, coursing about leisurely and carefree,  
rumbling spindrift rattling bluish-green waves.  
See those waves of misty fog vying for a hug from the south wind;  
for the moment, the vast, mist-covered waters converge and flow.  
Waisanding, an offshore shoal in the Taiwan Strait,  
exuding a misty poetic flavor,  
all around the elevated Bamboo House, the footprints of the Fisher-woman.

## Chapter XXVIII

### The Navel of the Sea

On the Summer Solstice a mysterious question mark appears in the western sky;  
the lovely Fisher-woman says that it was only at sunset that she was able to guess  
that the perpetual, watery hourglass had sealed Black Bow's pure determination  
to eternally pilot Evening Red, drifting about in a dream of love.

You, the reclining Kunshen, a most lovely maiden,  
at times wearing a colorful outfit of sunlight;  
at times putting on transparent wings of woven moonlight.  
I, the Merman, always on the margins of the Milky way, looking over you,  
returning eight times a year to see you,  
staying with you for an entire night, until daybreak,  
until the tide recedes, and rises again;  
then I depart, leaving behind a number of tear-born luminous pearls.  
You see me off with piping-hot tears,  
waving goodbye with a ribbon of wind-borne sand.  
See that lovely Kunshen, subtly shifting in this body of water,  
ever drifting south;  
as before, I continue scouring this body of water, immensely deep and  
inconceivable,  
for that mysterious Wind-settling Pearl.

Today the tide moves to a mysterious rhythm;  
the mist-shrouded sea conceals a restless subterranean stream.  
See that body of water, topped with boats, rafts, wind, and waves;  
singing surf dancing waves.  
At times, the surf collects into layered curtains of water;  
at times, the waves put up a silvery wall,

boats and rafts plunging in, leaping out.

The lovely Kunshen's mysterious bamboo houses;  
at times, this is a sand world; at times, a water world.

See the elevated walkway extending from the Wind Porch.

Every first and fifteenth day of the lunar month  
the Fisher-woman devotedly makes an offering to the Sea God,  
and prays for the safety of the fishing people of the shoal and coast.

The lovely Kunshen's mysterious bamboo houses;  
at times, this is a golden world of flowing sunlight;  
at times, a silvery world of wavering moonlight.

See that watery hourglass streaming through moso bamboo,  
grain by grain recording the eternal movement of time across these golden sands  
and silvery sea.

The first rays of the morning sun plunge into the Taiwan Strait,  
as the Fisher-woman stands on the elevated walkway gazing out into the distance;  
a mysterious butterfly boat freely floats about on the sea;  
rosy clouds of dawn greet one another on the fresh and bright surface of the water.

A silver raft crosses a golden wave,  
leaving behind a snow-white wake;  
several plumes of the sun slowly emerge from within the sea of clouds,  
gracefully sweeping over the gleaming waves.

See that butterfly boat, silvery and mysterious,  
traversing uncharted territory all over the Taiwan Strait, lovely as the Fragrant  
Ocean;

without rudder or compass,  
drifting about, freely following the waves,  
as if that wise and beautiful yi bird were spreading its wings,  
sweeping along the face of this inconceivable body of water, seeking a place to rest.  
Black Bow transforms her Evening Red into a manifestation of beauty itself,  
as the afternoon sun drapes the Taiwan Strait with a skirt of water, thin and



exceedingly bright.

See that butterfly boat, silvery and mysterious, scooping up the resplendent plumes  
of the sun,

attaching butterfly wings to the flanks of the sunlight,  
soaring towards the Peach Blossom Sister in Dongshi Harbor;  
in the dusk sky, several uncertain objects of billowing red,  
paint a scroll of deep azure-blue.

See that butterfly boat, silvery and mysterious, sweeping over the fading glow of  
twilight,

racing with the perpetual hourglass of the Waisanding shoal.

See who can bring time to a momentary halt,  
transcending the perpetual race with time.

See that tide-swept Kunshen under the moonlight in the first watch of the night,  
lovely as an ingenuous maiden, pure of sentiment.

See the tide rushing out, rushing in,  
accumulating energy,

guided by the moonlight,

rushing up to the elevated bamboo walkway,

in an instant obscuring the Wind Porch attached to the bamboo house.

See that watery hourglass framed by moso bamboo,  
racing around the eaves and ditches.

The lovely Fisher-woman stands on the high point of the elevated walkway;  
facing the direction of the apricot-colored flag mounted on top of the high mast of  
the sky-driven sail, she says:

“The tide,

so fond of tussling with the sea

when the moon is at its brightest.”

## Chapter XXIX

### The Rose on the Shoal

Tonight the roving Wind Pavilion  
stops on the open-air deck of this mysterious shoal;  
the elevated bamboo houses are the home base of the sea farers.  
Here nine families share one Wind Porch;  
each night all the fisher-women carefully listen  
to the whispered song of the tide;  
the Summer Solstice sees the fishermen off to sea;  
the Winter Solstice welcomes them back.

That night, fiery-red charcoal burns in this world of golden sand;  
nine bamboo poles stand tall, the distinctive emblem of Waisanding,  
embroidered with the image of the Merman and Kunshen.  
Next to the elevated bamboo walkway a waterfall of silver light flows backwards,  
as the starry lights on the fishing boats scurry about the sea.  
The fish in this body of water race to the surface for a glimpse of the moon;  
a fragrant south wind lightly stirs these golden sands and silvery sea,  
as a thick fog soundlessly permeates that watery hourglass.  
In the middle watch of the night,  
the Milky Way drapes this beautiful shoal  
with a rippling garment of multiple colors.  
Off in the distance, long waves  
paint an ink-wash painting of blue and white;  
in the last watch of the night, the south wind gradually gives way to the northwest  
rain;  
unexpectedly, the clear sky gives way to intermittent showers;  
in a moment, all the color departs  
from the thickly clouded sky.

The fishing women gather in the elevated Bamboo House  
to share their heartfelt aspirations,  
to discuss creating a blog presenting the lives of the 333 families living on the shoal.  
Suddenly, a flock of birds flies past the outer window of the Wind Porch,  
stopping on the watery hourglass next to the elevated bamboo walkway, waiting for  
the rain to end.

See that shoal, Waisanding,  
there in the Taiwan Strait, the western extreme of the Pacific Ocean,  
a mysterious roc turned into a beautiful leviathan,  
reclining all day, protecting the fishing folk along the coast.  
See the 333 boats of the fishermen,  
weathered hands grasping sturdy oars, slowly turning;  
see that fine drizzle dripping down from the cloudy sky,  
a roc become a Kunshen,  
group upon group of surging sand-waves trying to catch the wind.

Inside the elevated Bamboo House,  
a high abode of bamboo,  
there is a palace lantern shaped like the top of a parasol,  
hanging where the clouds meet the boundless firmament.  
Empty shell shell empty;  
a hermit crab moves into a hole.  
Wind-blown sand wavering garment;  
a summit formed from a hill a peak rising out of a valley.  
Your mysterious form drifting in the Taiwan Strait,  
Kunshen Kunshen lovely Kunshen,  
your promise to me, the Merman, as yet unfulfilled.  
See that Wind Porch with its hanging bamboo lantern;  
when time permits, a fisherman comes to sell noodles;  
see that flaming charcoal glowing a deep red next to the elevated walkway;  
from time to time, a craftsman comes to fashion the metal fittings on the fishing  
nets.

The rising tide energetically pounds the sandy shore,  
pounding, pounding, pounding,  
the symphony of the sea,  
a kettledrum continuously sounding.

Fisher-woman Fisher-woman lovely Fisher-woman;  
you say that tonight our collective dream is in your hands,  
that in a dream you can retrieve our memories of the past.  
You say that we collectively embrace the same hope, the same promise,  
come to make good on a common dream.  
I, the Merman, transform myself into a boat in the water, my arms for oars,  
taking the lovely Fisher-woman on an excursion through the silvery-white waves,  
in a contest with the force-7 winds;  
at times, delightedly taking you in pursuit of the setting sun,  
at times, delightedly embracing you while kissing the moonlight;  
at times, we sing “Red in Four Seasons” in placid waters;  
at times, we sing “Peach Blossom Takes the Ferry” in the raging sea;  
at times, we transform into a pair of birds flying wing-to-wing,  
charting out the course of a seven-colored rainbow in the green-blue sea;  
at times, we take a rest at dusk,  
becoming a sand dune of the future,  
just like a fragrant rose in the water, lovely and pure,  
blooming right here in the Taiwan Strait, a sea beyond the sea.  
See that watery nature of the water,  
moving about in an orderly fashion.  
We are in a collective dream,  
like jellyfish drifting about in pairs,  
embodying the ordered and natural secret of life.

## Chapter XXX

### Kunshen's Eternal Concern—The Merman's Quest

The sea of blue lapis lazuli flows with silvery waves capped with white  
and force-13 waves, like a pot of boiling soup.  
At ebb tide on the golden shoal the water level drops to a few inches;  
at high tide it rises many feet.  
In the daytime the sand flies faster than the wind;  
at night the waves move faster than the speed of light.  
See those waves and billows changing form;  
see that tide shifting its shape,  
as a boat skids over the peak of a wave,  
a raft comes to shore amidst whirling waters.  
A misty fog becomes a drizzly rain,  
all transformations of the churning surf.  
At times, the waves speed up,  
gleefully sending the boats and rafts off course;  
at times, the tide abruptly changes direction,  
gleefully dragging the beached sand back to sea.  
See that great umbrella, first known by the rain, propping up that sky-driven sail,  
cutting down to size any oversize waves that assail the shoal,  
as the sun setting in the western sky paints the water.  
See those surging waves leaping out their ribbon dance.

The Fisher-woman returns to the elevated Bamboo House,  
passing over the elevated walkway to arrive at the Wind Porch;  
through the long, uncovered lattice window,  
she catches sight of a flock of sea birds pursuing the setting sun.  
Wave upon wave made of memory passes through the red sun sinking on the  
horizon,

to reach the sea of memories past.

Thereupon, all thought and feeling loops around in that sea of dreams.

Kunshen Kunshen that huge roc inside the moon,  
come from the remote past to the present to make good on a promise,  
ever in love with the Merman of this body of water.

Frame by frame, the Fisher-woman passes by the lattice window on the Wind  
Porch;

minute by minute, time flows out of the watery hourglass;

inch by inch, the setting sun drops into the sea.

Oh the Merman's image appears from behind the sunset;  
the Fisher-woman unwittingly sheds clear and bright tears, one after another.

This is Kunshen's eternal concern, from the remote past, right up to the present;  
now cheerful and delighted, the Fisher-woman says:

"Merman Merman Have you found that Wind-settling Pearl?"

Detained, the weather front smuggles in a mist;

today a fine drizzle again falls on the shoal;

a dense cloud bank, subtly shifting, overspreads this deep-blue water world.

The Taiwan Strait, a rich watery pasture on the rim of the Pacific;

every grain of sand in this golden dune has a memory,

recording the story of each and every seafarer of this place;

each grain sings a song,

sings out the aspirations of the seafarers.

This body of blue water

is the repository of everything required by any treasure seeker;

this world of golden sand

is a way station for the migratory birds.

See the center of that Wind Porch,

ancient bronze mirrors—one big, one small—hanging on the upper left and lower  
right,

reflecting and responding to one another,

forming a perpetually swirling waterspout.

When the weather is clear, it's possible to see the silvery-white spindrift rending apart the deep-blue water-sky in a beauty contest with the white clouds in the firmament.

See this blue net glowing ostentatiously on this body of water;  
off in the distance, a drifting boat comes to rest on the periphery of the Taiwan Strait;

nearby, a solitary roving boat slowly pulls into the shallows of the shoal.

A gust of wind stirs the sand,  
misty fog springs up, filling the sky.

Fisher-woman Fisher-woman floating up from a childhood memory;

I am the Merman as a boy,

at sunset,

on the mist-shrouded shallows.

For the first time, we meet and play in the water;

you say that you are willing to be my Fisher-woman forever;

I say that I can't remain with you on the shoal;

you say that you will forever be waiting for me here;

I say that I'll return eight times every year,

until I find that Wind-settling Pearl,

and no longer need to go roving about...

It's said that another typhoon is forming far out at sea;

you want me to fear not the wind and the waves,

saying that you will make full use of your supernatural powers

to manifest millions upon millions of snow lotuses

to protect the elevated bamboo houses on these golden sands and silvery sea,

preventing the rolling waves the ardent tide

from overrunning the elevated walkway and the Wind Porch.

## Chapter XXXI

### **The Wondrous Undercurrent —Dreaming of an Ancient Waterway**

Rain for several nights in a row    clouds detained by a low pressure system wait for the front to pass.

Over this shoal hemmed in by the silvery sea, everywhere flashes of purple lightning fringed with blue;

the drum of heaven thunders through the night;

wave rolls up, only to come charging back;

billow mounts a peak, only to rush down into a valley.

Suddenly, everything is covered by a misty fog,

shrouding over the 333 fishing boats arrayed in the shallows.

The lovely Kunshen Maiden, softly dancing, graceful in form,

shedding your heavenly garment of cascading sand;

wave upon wave merging and separating;

billow upon billow embracing and parting;

peak upon peak piling up and crashing down;

banner upon banner upon watery banner roaring out;

stack upon stack upon stack of current welling up,

throwing up walls of water, one after another.

You, the lovely Kunshen Maiden, use your inherent intelligence

to seize that hazy inspiration.

I, the Merman, mounting the wings of the waves,

fly into your dream, riding in on the mist.

In those days, all the denizens of this beatific world of golden sands on the Taiwan Strait

were ever fond of singing a fishing song:

“A sky so dark,



a wind so strong..."

Afterwards, Black Bow came  
and refashioned it into a cantata for the sea.  
Tempests born in the Pacific are fond of overrunning this body of water,  
tempering the bravery and tenacity of the fishing folk  
for dealing with the abrupt mood swings of the loving-but-capricious sea.  
Singing in a high voice, Black Bow regards not the wind nor the waves.  
See those 333 fishing boats wrestling with the monstrous waves;  
rollers surging sidelong from north to south,  
galloping towards the east,  
ferocious groundswells growling at the harbors strung along the Taiwan Strait.  
See those overlapping dark clouds,  
rushing forth in the black light,  
lording over an arrested front;  
rain throughout the night an abundance of rainwater brought down for this shoal  
surrounded by the silvery sea.  
See those 333 boats and rafts enveloped by a misty fog.

Amidst the billows, ferry meets tempest;  
on the Wind Porch of the elevated Bamboo House  
is a tarp spread full with lemon grass brought from the hinterland by the Ferryman;  
whirling waves inside a banner reflecting the eye of dusk.  
Today on the shoal the wind picks up;  
a mysterious air current stirs up the golden grains of sand;  
try as it may, a mast in the wind fails to blow away that cloud propping up the sky,  
like a solitary plum blossom floating in the silvery surf.  
It's you, I, her, at a bright, fragrant place in a dream,  
making a pact, then sealing it for safekeeping.  
Kettle boiling over in the cool water,  
the broad undercurrent a fresh red pulse,

brings in basket after basket of beautiful fish—the name of which I know not—  
converging and flowing through an inconceivable ancient channel.  
Grass sandals, 333 pairs in all, squat on the elevated bamboo walkway;  
fishing hats, 333 in all, bobbing on the mysterious sea.  
Evening sky dyed red by the declining golden sun;  
on a sand dune the Fisher-woman paints a self portrait;  
a silvery shuttle darts through the water at the speed of light;  
it's that Black Bow, again gone to sea.  
A gust of wind escorts a solitary sail,  
etching a grain across the interface of water and sky.  
Wave chasing wave slowly drawing close;  
billow pushing billow slowly merging on the shore.  
A golden shoal covered by a layer of opaque moonlight;  
off in the distance, snow lotuses spar on the water.  
Wielding the quill pen brought by the rabbit in the moon, the Sea God draws  
magic talismans all around;  
a raft rowing towards the place of the rising moon.

Night arrives;  
deep in the sea a murmuring current  
searches for the way out of a primal dream.  
A drenching rain falls on the shoal;  
a sultry air pervades the Bamboo House;  
off in the distance, an unexpected boat, unacquainted with these waters,  
becomes grounded in the shallows.  
See this body of water,  
an overflowing crest, an upright billow,  
giving off six types of mysterious vibrations.  
Wind blows an invisible wing;  
wave sprinkles an invisible feather.  
See that misty water world

harboring all things marvelous and subtle.  
So it was prior to 1950;  
today all that remains are a few forlorn fishing huts,  
grounded on the shoal...

## Chapter XXXII

### The Merman's Revolving Emotions

The middle watch of the night in the middle of this silvery sea of clouds there  
appears a mysterious keyhole  
emitting a faint yellow light,  
waiting for someone—who, I know not—to obtain its golden key..

In the first watch of the night, all the boats of the fishermen  
freely wander about on this body of water;  
the moonlight transforms into a shattered mirror,  
a jigsaw puzzle on the sea.  
Wave upon wave, the surf and the tide  
wantonly approach the golden shore and kiss the lovely Kunshen,  
the azure water forming a deep water-sky mirror.  
Suddenly, off in the distance, there appears a long wave, white as snow,  
slicing through the water like a razor-sharp knife;  
all at once, a pink aureole surrounds the silvery moon;  
open, the winged sail flies up;  
the ebullient and unrestrained wind, that grand master of wave-building.  
Taking advantage of the moonlight, an osprey scours the surface of the water in  
search of prey;  
guided by the North Star, a king crab  
courses through the ocean depths.

The last watch of the night the smoke of charcoal suddenly rises in the western  
sky,  
dying the white clouds a dense black;  
a cinnabar ink pad has appeared on the eastern shore—when, and by whose hand, I  
know not—

slowly smudging out patches of red.  
The living moonlight, the watery blue diamond, the Taiwan Strait;  
instantly gobbled up by that passionate, reduplicating redness,  
slice by slice.

Early morning, wind blowing from the south,  
merry waves of all shapes and sizes dance a tango;  
in the afternoon, layers of thick fog shroud this pellucid body of water.  
The lovely Kunshen Maiden,  
mysterious goddess of the Taiwan Strait,  
transformed into this golden world,  
like a sky-driven sail, a 28-bow umbrella  
protecting the fishing folk along this coast,  
watching over these 333 fishing boats,  
waiting for the beloved Merman to return with the Wind-settling Pearl.  
Waisanding, the golden manifestation of the lovely Kunshen.  
See that pair of eyes, enchanting as the moonlight,  
as dazzling as a peach blossom in spring;  
see that pair of vermillion lips, rivaling the rosy clouds of dawn,  
as sweet and inviting as a ripe summer cherry.  
You, forever remaining here,  
watching, waiting  
for me, the Merman, to return with that mysterious Wind-settling Pearl.

The first rays of the morning sun hang a resplendent banner from the upper  
reaches of the clouds;  
in the water-sky of the Taiwan Strait  
there appears a charming cheek, light-colored and lovely.  
Riding the first rays of daylight,  
traversing the ocean depths,  
I catch sight of a purple winged fox;

taking a closer look,  
I realize that it's a manifestation of Black Bow's Evening Red.  
Off in the distance, curving waves, as though the grain of that cloud in the sky  
were etched onto the surface of the water.  
Last night, the shoal draped with a watery garment,  
this morning, woken by the breaking of day,  
at sunrise, watching the boats and rafts sailing homeward,  
holds laden with fish,  
making for this world of golden sand, following the rising orb of the sun.

See this Taiwan Strait, boiling with waves.  
In this body of water the murmuring moisture of the tide is eager to move;  
in an instant, the pulse of the waves beats 73 times;  
the ardent high tide, still lingering in last night's swell;  
the surging surf, still drunk, lingering in last night's untrammelled moonlight.  
See that orb of the rising sun sprinkling down a genial plume of light;  
the receding tide casting out bubbly pearls,  
each in its turn burst by the wind-born grains of sand.  
See those mysterious trenches heading inland from the tidal flats,  
guiding in the water fairies coursing in the deep blue.  
All at once, in the middle of the sea, a lightninglike foam fills the sky,  
the clear blue surface of the water empty and bright,  
an ancient bronze mirror, deep blue, reflecting all things,  
including the fishermen who went out to sea last night,  
now returning to shore, happily singing in their boats and rafts.  
In the center of the sea, leaping water fairies  
produce a subtle sort of happiness element  
to give to the denizens of this forgotten world off the coast.  
The earliest fisher folk to come here  
had no fear of wind or waves;  
a happy song on their lips and in their hearts,  
always and forever...

## Chapter XXXIII

### Return to the Frontier Islet

Today the blue sea drops in a stairway of light,  
foam flying on the surface pursues the spindrift fleeing from the clutches of the waves;

a slice of water slowly turns greenish-blue;  
gusts of fragrant wind from the south sway the white clouds high above.  
From time to time, a boat or a raft comes to these untrammelled waters  
occasionally looking back.

See that spindrift, born in the wake a boat, dancing gracefully amongst the watercraft,

singing the praises of that happy era on Waisanding, that shoal of golden sand  
surrounded by the silvery sea.

Suddenly the rosy clouds of dawn draw back the colored ribbon of a cloud-  
adorned rainbow,

like a newly fashioned tutu,  
hem embroidered with silver-white peach-blossom waves.

A primeval shoal, like a vortex whirling on the Taiwan Strait;  
a mysterious and resplendent collection of amethyst, gold dust, and diamonds;  
elevated bamboo houses like a dynamic geomancer's scroll.

Every fisherman has a pair of grass sandals  
and a broad fishing hat.

See those boats and rafts, like monochrome butterflies,  
free and easy, shuttling about in the blue-white tidal flats;  
a raft practices backward somersaults on the waves and billows;  
a boat practices U-turns on the waves and swells.

Today in the Taiwan Strait off the Pacific Ocean, a vast, hazy fog.

Waisanding, this shoal of golden sand surrounded by the silvery sea,

a mysterious corner beyond the pale of the 319 municipalities of Taiwan.  
This is a borderland, a world beyond the world;  
a manifestation of the lovely Kunshen Maiden;  
a sand castle built by the Merman, dreaming in a dream,  
raised up by the Merman and Kunshen.  
That sky-driven sail with a jeweled top and 28 bows for ribs,  
forever guarding this stretch of the Taiwan Strait.  
Abruptly a rosy light pours down from the western sky,  
a red cloud appears in the east and floats in the firmament.  
See that lofty mast propping up the vault of heaven,  
a banner bright and fragrant flutters with the wind,  
guiding the fishermen on their way home.  
This body of water has been draped—I know not when—with a flame-red robe,  
purple lightning shooting out from within a red light.

I, the Merman, on the elevated walkway joined to the Wind Porch of the Bamboo House,  
pass by the water curtain flowing down from the halved-lengths of bamboo;  
adjusting my eyes,  
I focus on your soft, lovely face, framed by 111 window frames.  
Like a flash memory, in an instant  
I browse over and record the pulsations from the 84,000 pores on your body;  
instantly drawn in by the gentle and loving expression in your eyes,  
like a pair of heavenly pools amidst the vast, rippling sea,  
revealing a distinctive perspicacity.  
Your delicate fragrance, like a heavy dew, comes wafting in on the south wind,  
mixing with my sour and salty beads of sweat.  
Suddenly, a mysterious wave rises up in that pair of heavenly pools,  
a heat-convection cloud system emerges from the center of the vast expanse.  
A school of fair fish—the name of which I know not— can't resist the compulsion  
to leap out of the water and take a peek at that world that once was theirs,



and your face inside those III windows, glorious as the rosy clouds of dawn.  
At that time, you were only 18;  
this entire world of golden sand surrounded by the silvery sea  
raised up for you in a brilliant array of color,  
overflowing with an atmosphere of growth and vitality.  
See that vast expanse of water, instantly transforming into a bright ebullience,  
alternating between emptiness and your innumerable true forms.

See that silvery sand dune with its lovely spiral shells,  
each harboring the spirit of some supernatural creature.  
Off in the distance, Black Bow's rakish boat mounts the long waves rising up from  
the azure-blue water,  
laying down a path of light, riding the waves, performing a sword dance in the  
gleaming red reflection of the rising sun.  
See that snow-white blade,  
slicing through that water-sky of dark green and azure blue.  
The tide recedes from the lovely Kunshen;  
in a moment, a layer of thin fog descends on theses golden sands and silvery sea,  
like a translucent sari waving on your golden body.  
At that very moment, inside the III window frames,  
you face the sun  
and swallow the pill of immortality I brought back from that mighty, inconceivable  
channel.  
Instantly you see into my mind,  
see all my yearning for you.  
Your veins and arteries seething with excitement,  
a pellucid tear of happiness in the corner of your eye.

## Chapter XXXIV

### **The Ninth Day of the Birth of Autumn**

From 3,000 nautical miles away, from the sea beyond the sea,  
I have brought back this cloth puppet, made using a technique handed down by an  
old craftsman,  
to keep you company on these golden sands amidst the silvery sea.  
See that dance costume on the puppet, bluish green and dark purple,  
never getting wet while joining you as you work in the water;  
the 333 boats and rafts beyond the shallows, fond of returning home at the crack of  
dawn.

That very night, the Ferryman brings 111 red bricks,  
you, the Fisher-woman, use them to make a stove;  
the Peach Blossom Sister brings an old copper pot  
to place on the stove;  
I help the Fisher-woman put up a square shed of moso bamboo,  
topped with layer upon layer of lemon grass,  
specially treated to be flame resistant and keep out the wind and rain.  
On the eave above the main entrance the Fisher-woman writes "Celestial Kitchen."  
Forthwith, out comes a pot of piping hot yam soup, yellow inside of red;  
presently, beyond the dune, the tide has reached its limit.  
Next to the door of the Celestial Kitchen is an old, worn out wicker chair,  
swaying in the wind, leisurely and carefree;  
on its back the faded words "Extraordinary Offering" can still be seen...

Three days earlier, a weather front passed through these golden sands and silvery  
sea;  
the Rain God visited last night;  
today a watery mist hangs in the air.  
333 boats and rafts in a boundless fog pull in to shore;

off in the distance, a green bird follows the Old Fisherman's Wind Pavilion,  
in search of a new harbor for taking a rest.

Rays of brilliant sunlight shoot down from the east,  
piercing through the surface of the thick fog,  
barging into this world of golden sands and silvery sea,  
absorbing layer upon layer of moisture.

All of a sudden, the ground mist turns into colorful scuds rising in the sky;  
off in the distance, a wave sweeps across the arched water-sky;  
driven by the wind, a sea of red clouds converges and flows;  
a boat traverses a long wave;  
a raft paddles into an imposing swell.  
See that surf, a chimera slipped out of a dream of the great sea;  
leaping foam and bubbles,  
a boisterous bevy of water fairies playfully sporting about.

On the ninth day of the Birth of Autumn<sup>34</sup>  
the orb of the sun, like your cherry lips,  
leaves a deep impression on the surface of the golden sand.  
You, I, embracing, ten fingers interlocked;  
you, I, wearing full-length white robes,  
one hue deepening the next.  
You, the lovely Kunshen, shudder;  
thereupon, I, the Merman, perceive six different sorts of vibrations coming from  
your body,  
a sort of primal life-energy arousing that mild pulse wave;  
a sort of calling out of the true mind to the fingerprint;  
a sort of response by the fingerprint to the true mind;  
a sort of promise and fulfillment of true love and pure emotion.  
I see your heartfelt yearning for me written on your lips;  
you sense how sincerely I care for you in my dreams by the feeling of my kiss.  
You, I, embracing, ten fingers interlocked;

---

34. The 13th of the 24 two-week periods in the Chinese lunar calendar, approximately August 7th to August 22nd in the Gregorian calendar.

seeming as if several centuries have gone by in a moment.  
You, I, closely interacting through the true mind;  
transmitting an eternal impression of true love.  
Cheek pressed against my temple,  
you say that you want to wrap up this sweet and luscious moment;  
that you want me to dauntlessly continue my journey along that ancient channel,  
great and inconceivable,  
and retrieve that supreme ambergris;  
that you will be here waiting for me on these golden sands and silvery sea.  
I want you to sleep well every night; dream well; wake well.

Several days earlier, on the ninth day of the Waking of Insects,<sup>35</sup>  
late afternoon; the parting rays of the red sun,  
like your cherry lips,  
leaving a deep impression on this interface of golden sand.  
You say that today there seems to have been a green bird  
chasing a tiny ladybug as it was exiting the Wind Porch to bask in the sun.  
I say that I've brought from the distant seas some of the colors of spring  
wrapped into luscious-looking spring rolls as a treat for you.  
You say that since this is the season when all creation wakes up,  
there should be no concealing of our love and real feelings.  
With the setting sun as witness, we promise to meet on the shoal at midnight on  
the Spring Equinox  
and together gaze on the northeast sky,  
waiting for the arrival of that cloud of black, blue-green, and yellow,  
praying for the happiness and well-being of the fisher-folk of this realm of golden  
sands surrounded by the silvery sea.

---

35. The third of the 24 two-week periods in the Chinese lunar calendar, approximately March 6th to March 20th in the Gregorian calendar.

## Chapter XXXV

### The 28-bow Umbrella in the Water-sky Mirror

A rogue wave careens three feet above the surface of the water,  
like a galloping Ferghana horse drawing the afternoon sun across the sky.  
Off in the distance, a blinding darkness approaches,  
as waterspouts revolve.

Black Bow's Evening Red

leaps over walls of water thrown up by the waves,  
shaking off billow after billow;  
the shuttlelike boat spins round and enters the center of the sea,  
a black body of water churning like a boiling pot of soup.  
Everywhere, careening waves and billows collide,  
boats and rafts tossed up from the ends of tumbling waves;  
a mysterious conch sets forth a powerful underwater current,  
deep, dark, welling up from the bottom of the sea.  
In an instant, layers of waves, billows, and swells thrown high;  
boats and rafts seized on all sides by the undercurrent lying in wait.  
One after another, walls of water come tumbling down  
onto the elevated bamboo houses on the shoal.

On this moonless night

a raging storm invades this body of water.

The Ferryman in his *Boathouse* and the Old Fisherman in his Wind Pavilion,  
one moment, flying off the peak of a wave,  
one moment, making a crash landing into a trough.

All the boats and rafts bewildered and disoriented  
by the great magical illusion manifested by the tempest.

On the Wind Porch of the Bamboo House,

the Fisher-woman joins her palms together in front of her chest and entreats the

Sea God

to bring all the fishermen safely back to the shoal.

Black Bow searches everywhere for the fishermen scattered on that body of water,  
vast and boiling,

hoping to show them the way out of that watery labyrinth,

to lead them back to the safety of those golden sands amidst the silvery sea.

That night, wave rolls up wave rolls up the shoal;

upsurge overturns upsurge rummaging through the bamboo houses.

All the boats and rafts have lost their anchors and rudders,  
off course,

adrift on the blinding dark sea.

A mountainous wave collapses from above,

a billow makes a 180 degree turn;

a stratus cloud turns into a spiraling black hole;

wind spins water into a whirlpool;

gushing pillars shaped like dragons

lock down this dreamlike shoal on the edge of the Taiwan Strait.

A boat gets drawn into a trough, ambushed by the dark swell,

a raft makes a B-line through the blackness.

Today this body of water has transformed into a huge, ferocious beast,  
mouth agape, intending to swallow Kunshen.

See those twisting waves dashing against misshapen billows,

joining together in a frenzied dance on this dreamlike shoal;

see those seething snow lotuses, colliding in that pot of boiling soup;

all the fishing boats in a frightful dream,

unable to find a safe harbor.

Squalls of black wind pull tight the flashing thunderbolts, tie down the raging sea,  
enraging the lightning, causing the billows to bellow with wrath,  
pursuing far and wide the hapless boats and rafts.

In this incessantly tossing body of water,

waves flee hither and thither,  
hugging and kissing, not the slightest gap in between;  
billows swelling upward to the height of excitement.

I, the Merman, swimming out of a dream, reach a point just off the shore  
and pull on a mysterious silver rope  
connecting the seven shoals along the Taiwan Strait,  
that string of arching eyebrows,  
forming them  
into a natural barrier  
blocking the towering waves,  
preventing the raging sea  
from attacking the homes of the fishing folk along the coast.  
In this vast, boundless sea  
there remains only myself and the seven Kunshen Maidens,  
to struggle against this summer typhoon packing force-13 gales.  
On Waisanding we raise up the umbrella of 28 bows  
to protect the eastern coast of the Taiwan Strait,  
as well as the elevated bamboo houses, those rustic dwellings of the fishing folk.

## Chapter XXXVI

### Sounding the White Conch of the Dharma

The Summer Solstice; no wind, no waves;  
warning the fisher folk that a typhoon will touch ground three days hence.  
At dusk, the western sky emits a red flame, like an erupting volcano;  
the bright red setting sun leaves its cachet on the thousand-petaled rosy clouds;  
in the middle of the vast sea is a murmuring vein, wanting to move, fermenting.  
The shoal, filled with humid, salty air;  
a formless wave searches for that network of geometric pathways,  
an invisible wind toying with the shape of a spiraling stream of clouds.  
Taking advantage of the pre-typhoon calm, fishing boats cast their nets,  
fishermen with a wealth of experience scouring the length and breadth of this  
lovely body of water.  
The air current produced by the wind begins to roar on the crests of the waves;  
throwing up sand squalls on the beach,  
grain by grain, subtly migrating south,  
a huge hourglass, as it were, slowing coming from the north.  
On the high sea is a silvery-white lotus boat,  
a fragrant banner, transparent and bright, high atop the mast.

This is the golden era of the shoal;  
this is the benchmark.  
The fishermen fear not the wind and the waves,  
all fond of singing the song of the sea.  
See that setting sun, plunging into the depths of the sea,  
a ripened red apple, as it were, dropping from its branch,  
sinking into the silvery waters.  
The Fisher-woman walks out of a small, square kiosk  
next to the Bamboo House.



The bamboo-framed windows on the Wind Porch,  
neatly arrayed,  
all opened by the wind—I know not when.  
The elevated bamboo bridge,  
each section sealed by the water—I know not when.  
Golden sands, silvery sea silvery sea, golden sands;  
surging waves, billows, swells, racing in all directions.  
Boats and rafts cast their nets into liminal space;  
the primordial fishermen here fear not the wind and the waves,  
so fond of singing the song of the sea.

Inside the moon, I, the Merman, transform into a red-crested crane  
and fly towards the Taiwan Straight  
to visit you, the lovely Kunshen Maiden.  
It's said that you came to this patch of silvery sea several thousand years ago  
and transformed into a world of golden sand.  
Waisanding has an umbrella supported by 28 bows;  
here the singing golden sand flows throughout the year.  
See that wing skipping on the water, a flying scallop,  
following the tide in and out to catch a glimpse of your lovely form,  
draped with a dress of snow-white surf hemmed with golden lace.  
You say that you are an angel in my dreams;  
I say that I am your Sun God;  
you say that you have come to this silvery sea to fulfill a beautiful dream;  
I say that it was a beautiful dream  
that drew me here...  
You say that this is the home of the happy-go-lucky fishing folk, content, simple,  
sincere, good;  
you say that you have come to protect them,  
to offer eternal hope;  
I say that I will go to that mighty, inconceivable channel

to retrieve the Wind-settling Pearl and help you fulfill your noble aspiration,  
and bring you eternal happiness;  
you say that I am your dance stage,  
that you are my eternal confidant.

See that orb of the sun rising out of the water,  
tide slowly receding from the shoal;  
see that body of yours, wet yet without the slightest chill.  
You say that it was my hand that warmed your heart;  
I say that it was your boiling tears that left me unable to leave you.  
See that rosy glow of dawn gently kissing your watery garment, thin and  
transparent.  
You say that it was I who released your surging ardor.  
Presently, I must leave you and travel afar,  
ever in search of that Wind-settling Pearl with the power to pacify these vast,  
moody waters.

## Chapter XXXVII

### **Dreaming in a Dream The Ancient Mirror of the Moon**

It's the final glow of twilight, just before the declining sun gathers up its rays;  
it's the wave in back launching a surprise attack on the swell in front;  
it's the multiplying waves.

Dusk, a reverie in the Bamboo House;  
moon rising; the watery hourglass outside the screen of black bamboo slowly  
recedes into darkness.

See that window outside the window of the elevated Bamboo House;  
the huge, bright orb of the moon peeks out from within the clouded sky,  
emitting a mysterious white light running between the water and clouds.

See that real surf,  
at times becoming illusory foam;  
see those gleaming blossoms of light riding the waves, the mark of reality;  
yet, at times, becoming illusory bubbles in a dream.

In the middle of the clouds a silver rose roasts the bright orb of the moon;  
from the falling surf, I, the Merman, catch a glimpse of you, the lovely Kunshen,  
hidden inside that broken mirror of moonlight.

Unwittingly, the crescent moon draws me into your mid-summer night's dream  
to download your mysterious genetic map of the future.

Tonight, in your dream, I put you at the helm;  
you suggest that I become a crane, you become a roc,  
and that together we fly high up into the heavens.  
See those pupils of yours, still harboring a pearl of joy,  
the space between your eyebrows betraying a flush of excited bashfulness.  
You say that it was because I called on you on March 17th, at 3:17 in the afternoon,  
that last night, in a dream within a dream within a dream,  
you used that shattered moonlight

to draw me into your dream.

In the dream, a gentle breeze of endearing words entered into your ears.

You want me to lift up that long wave by its waist,

and attach it to the hem of your watery dress welling up in the surf.

You want me to create

a blog featuring the virtual shoal of the future,

to prevent these golden sands amidst the silvery sea from disappearing forever;

to prevent this precious parasol,

this natural barrier, from disappearing forever;

to make that lofty old lighthouse

bear eternal testimony to the fishing folk, simple, honest, happy-go-lucky.

Today, the water has put on a totally new color;

blue giving birth to dark green, then turning green-blue.

On the shoal are the water fairies, having flown in last night,

only to miss the outgoing tide on its way out to sea;

now detained in this realm of golden sand,

they are slowly transformed by the sun

into mist, fog, and clouds rising in the sky.

Early that morning,

bright-red clouds spring up in the sky like blooming peonies;

a wonderful scent permeates these golden sands amidst the silvery sea,

given off by the Wind-settling Pearl and ambergris

brought back from that mysterious, inconceivable channel by me, the Merman.

You happily embrace me,

pressing your cheeks against my ears,

your orchid scent.

I say that I no longer need to wander about;

you seal my lips with your kiss.

Quiet, slow, silent, still;

we don't say a word.

Tonight, a sweet taste  
flows out of the expression in our eyes,  
that all-encompassing scroll of purple jade, rolled up by this body of water.

You, the lovely Kunshen Maiden,  
for the sake of the fishing people along the coast,  
again transform yourself into these golden sands in the midst of the silvery sea, an  
umbrella with 28 bows.

For you, I, the Merman, have searched this vast expanse of water  
for the Wind-settling Pearl to calm the Taiwan Strait.

Tonight, this world of golden sand and silvery sea has left its place and transformed  
into a moon spread with gold.

You, the Fisher-woman, forever content with your lot;

I, the Merman, ever at your side;

with the Wind-settling Pearl now pacifying the waters of the Taiwan Strait,

I need wander about no more.

Together we will protect the fishing boats on this sea beyond the sea;

silently transforming, shifting south,

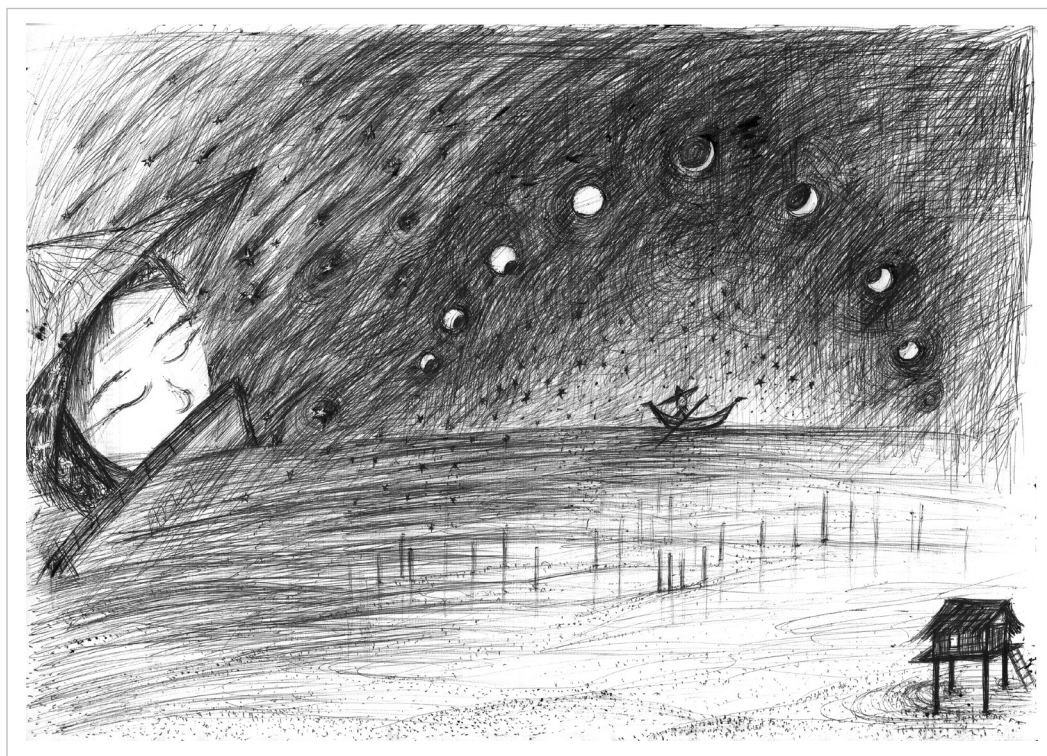
following the seasonal winds.

You, I, travelers on the horizon, from beyond time and space,

piloting the dreamlike flying shuttles 080 and 1601 towards 12022021. ☺

Yu Hsi





繪圖 / 李青倫