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# Syntax

She walks to a table

She walk to table

She is walking to a table

She walk to table now

What difference does it make

What difference it make

In Nature, no completeness

No sentence really complete thought

Language, like woman

Look best when free, undressed

## Of Flesh & Spirit

I was a virgin till twenty-three, then always had more than one lover at the same time—all secret.

In China, people go to jail for watching porno videos while condoms and pills are given out free.

When I saw the first bra my mom made for me, I screamed and ran out in shame.

For a thousand years, women's bound feet were the most beautiful and erotic objects for Chinese. Tits and asses were nothing compared to a pair of three-inch "golden lotuses." They must have been crazy or had problems with their noses. My grandma's feet, wrapped day and night in layers of bandages, smelled like rotten fish.

The asshole in Chinese: the eye of the fart.

A twenty-five-year-old single woman worries her parents. A twenty-eight-year-old single woman worries her friends and colleagues. A thirty-year-old single woman worries her bosses. A thirty-five-year-old woman is pitied and treated as a sexual pervert.

The most powerful curse: fuck your mother, fuck your grandmother, fuck your great-grandmother of eighteen generations.

One day, my father asked my mother if our young rooster was mature enough to jump, meaning to "mate." I cut in before my mother answered: "Yes, I saw him jump onto the roof of the chicken coop." I was ten years old.

Women call menstruation “the old ghost,” science books call it “the moon period,” and refined people say “the moonlight is flooding the ditch.”

My first lover vowed to marry me in America after he took my virginity. He had two kids and an uneducated wife, and dared not ask the police for a divorce. He took me to see his American Chinese cousin who was staying in the Beijing Hotel and tried to persuade his cousin to sponsor him to come to New York. But his cousin sponsored me instead. That’s how I’m here and why he went back to his wife, still cursing me.

Chinese peasants call their wives: that one in my house; old Chinese intellectuals: the doll in a golden house; in socialist China, husbands and wives call each other “my lover.”

The story my grandma never tired of telling was about a man who was punished for his greed and had to walk around with a penis hanging from his forehead.

We don’t say “fall in love,” but “talk love.”

When I left home, my father told me: “never talk love before you’re twenty-five years old.” I waited till twenty-three. Well, my first lover was a married coward. My first marriage lasted a week. My husband slept with me once, and I never saw him again.

## Sparks

When I was eight  
I lit a coal stove every morning  
staring at the sparks jump and  
dance out of flames  
as I fanned them with a palm leaf  
Mother said they were fairies in exile  
turned into diamonds  
She knit a crown  
to adorn my childhood

When I was eight  
I went fishing in a flooded stream  
I floated on water  
pebbles were my pillows  
I looked up at the milky clouds  
spreading across the sky  
Father said they were angels in exile  
turned into waterfalls  
He folded a boat  
to bear away my childhood

## Female Marriage

Chinese characters for marriage: *qu* 娶—a man getting married, and *jia* 嫁—a woman getting married.

*Jia* 嫁 is made of two components: the left part is *nü* 女—woman, and the right part, *jia* 家—home.

If a thirty-year-old woman still remains single, every member of her family, every female colleague of hers, gets busy to find her a husband. If she shows no interest, she's suspected of being a hermaphrodite. But if she shows too much interest, or changes boyfriends constantly, she'll be called a "broken shoe," "rotten meat," or *zou ma deng*—lanterns with paper-cut figures made to revolve when it's lit, something like a dizzying merry-go-round.

Every Chinese believes that a husband is a woman's *guisu*—her final home to return to.

*Nainai* stands for paternal grandma. Its literal translation is "breast breast," or "milk milk."

*Waipo* stands for maternal grandma. *Wai* means "outside," "stranger." *Po*, "old woman."

My Waipo used to weep when she brushed my hair. "What are you going to do, my baby? Your hair is too tough, so will be your fate. Try not to be so pigheaded, try to learn some obedience. Otherwise you'll never find a husband."

*Fu chang fu sui*—when man sings, wife follows.

*Nuzi wu cai bian shi de*—ignorance is woman's virtue.

My father's favorite curse to my mother is *bi yang de*—born out of a cunt, as if he came out of something else.

Other curses for women:

Cheap stuff

Losing money commodity

Disastrous flood

Stinky whore

Fox spirit

Shrew

Even Confucius, the wisest and kindest saint, complained that women and inferior men are hard to raise.

For seventy-five years, my Nainai walked on her heels because all her toes were broken and bent under the soles to make a pair of “golden lotuses.” She brought up her two sons alone, by working in the fields and delivering babies for her neighbors. I don't know her name. No one knows her name, not even herself. When she was a girl, she was called a girl, maybe Number 1 or Number 2. When she got married, her neighbors called her “wife of so-and-so,” and her husband called her *wei*—equivalent to “hello.” After she had her first son, she got the name “mother of so-and-so.”

When I was a kid, I was crazy about keeping my hair long. But my father cursed at me every time he saw me brushing it, and my mother chased me around with a pair of scissors.

All our lives, we've never felt attractive enough.  
But for whom do we struggle to look beautiful?

Chinese proverbs: A married daughter is spilt water. If she marries a chicken, she becomes a chicken; if she marries a dog, she becomes a dog.

Confucius says: "It is not pleasing to have to do with women or people of base condition. If you show them too much affection, they become too excited, and if you keep them at a distance, they are full of resentment.

Never deal with a businesswoman, Chinese men often warn each other. They are too powerful, well-armed with thousands of years of experiences in intrigues and plots to survive in family and society.

With a pair of "golden lotuses," she enters the code of "pure love," a code of tears and suffering.

Thanks to her small feet, my Nainai was able to get married even before her period started. She gave birth to two boys and a girl. When she was 25, her husband died. She was given two choices: marry again and leave her boys, her house and land to the care of her husband's relatives, or stay in her late husband's house as a widow forever and bring up the kids. She chose the second, not only because she couldn't bear separating from her boys, but also because her husband's early death had given her a bad name, and no decent man would go near her.

A woman with high cheek bones brings bad luck to her husband—a sign of "husband killer."

It's also bad luck for men to walk under a clothesline with women's underwear drying on it.

By becoming martyrs, we managed to leave some names for ourselves in the vast army of the anonymous: concubines,



courtesans, a few empresses, a few poets and soldiers, the other half of the sky, and the girls of iron.

*Yu gui*—return home, standing for female marriage, first appeared in the “Book of Songs” about two thousand years ago. Girls are homeless until they get married, until they *chu jia*.

She called in the voice of a human. She called in the voice of a woman. But no one would help her out of the abyss. Only when she pretended to be her own child and report herself as a negligent mother did someone take her away in handcuffs to make her function as a mother again.

Some women cover their faces with veils and some with powder.

Old plus a female noun always makes a good insult: old woman, old girl, old cow, old bitch, old crone, old bat, old hag, old mother-in-law.

I asked my Nainai why she sold her daughter for a morsel of food. “To keep your father and uncle alive,” she said. “You’d have done the same. If something happened to my boys, both my daughter and I would be thrown out of the house, and we’d both have died. Everything was under their names, no matter how young.”

My sister was divorced for giving birth to a girl. She didn’t blame her husband, or her mother-in-law who forced her son to choose another woman. She blamed only her failed womb which couldn’t bear an heir for the family.

There are 223 characters with the component of *nü*—woman. Many of them show woman as the source of all misfortunes and evils:

- Nu* 奴 : slaves, the name women called themselves.
- Bi* 婢 : woman slave.
- Jian* 奸 : evil, traitor, and adultery (another way to write this word is to put three women on top of each other).
- Ru* 如 : follow, obey.
- Ji* 妓 : prostitute.
- Yao* 妖 : all the things that are alien, abnormal, monster, evil.
- Du* 妒 : jealousy. Other words for this meaning (all with woman as the component:     *ji*, *mao*, *jie*).
- Ping* 姘 : adultery, a couple living together without a marriage certificate.
- Lan* 婪 : greedy.
- Xian* 嫌 : suspicion.
- Lan* 懒 : lazy.
- Piao* 嫖 : go whoring.

Ask a Chinese man why women are associated with disasters, he'll immediately give you a list of those who ruined the greatest emperors and brought down entire kingdoms: Daji, a fox spirit; Yang Guifei, a fat concubine; Chen Yuanyuan, a prostitute.

I think of what happened to my grandmothers, what's happening to my mother and my sister, all those years of not knowing where or who they are. I'm not taking that road. But the only way for help is to think back through my grandmothers and my mother.

The national curse for Chinese is *ta ma de*—his mother's (cunt).

The most vicious curse for men is *jue zi jue sun*—May you have no son!

## Haiku Trio

### FIRST LOVE

To show her he was a man,  
he underwent the fire department exam  
and died of a heart attack in the process.



### BLESSING

My mother, sitting on a turtle  
with a snake around her neck, announced my fortune:  
The star of your husband won't shine till you're fifty.



### A FLASH OF THOUGHT FROM THE RIVER

I really think I have nothing to do with humans  
though I occasionally drown a few  
to remind them of their origin.

