

超人

Superman

Translated by Gong Shifen

HE BIN was a cold young man. He had never been seen to have anything to do with other people. There were lots of people living in his building, but he took no notice of them. He did not eat in the communal dining-room, and even when he came across someone occasionally in the corridors he rarely bothered to greet them. When the postman came, lots of other young men rushed out with delight to get their letters. He Bin never had any mail. He hardly ever spoke, except to exchange a few words about business with his colleagues in the office or to make the usual perfunctory remarks to his landlady Granny Cheng when she brought him his meals.

Not only did he have no social contact with other people, he had no liking for anything that showed the slightest signs of life. There was not a single flower or plant in his room, which was as cold and dark as a cave. However, his book shelves were piled high with books. He would come back from the office alone, head down, go into his room, shut the door, take off his hat and sit down at the desk. He would pick up a book at random and read automatically. Occasionally, when he felt tired, he would stand up and take a turn around his room. Now and then he would pull open the curtain and look out, only to close it again before long.

Granny Cheng was the only person he treated differently. Sometimes when she brought him his meals, she would stand there and chat with him. She would ask him why he kept to himself so. To the dozens of questions she asked he would occasionally say a few words in reply:

“The world is empty. Human life is meaningless. Man’s relationships to others, to the universe, and to creation, are all so much play-acting: On stage, father and

son, mother and daughter seem so intimate; off stage, they remove their masks and go their separate ways. Whether you laugh or cry, it is all the same. So it is better for people to ignore each other than to become dependent on each other. Nietzsche was right: Both love and sympathy are evil”

Although Granny Cheng was rather perplexed by his words, she half understood what he was saying, and replied with a smile:

“If that’s the case, what’s the meaning of living? Wouldn’t it be better to die, to cease to exist? Why bother to eat and get dressed?”

“That would be valuing yourself and the world too much,” he smiled. “Why not let nature take its course, just like the floating clouds and flowing water?” Granny Cheng was about to say something more when she noticed his expression had grown distant. Head lowered, he was intent on eating. She did not dare speak again.

He woke up suddenly in the night. He heard wretched moaning coming from the ground floor of the building opposite. The anguished sound continued intermittently, disrupting the silent darkness of the night. Although He Bin was not at all moved by the sound, he could not get back to sleep. Moonlight streamed through the curtain and he recalled many things from his childhood – his loving mother, stars in the sky, flowers in the garden His mind was exhausted and he tried his utmost to shut out these thoughts, but they kept crowding into his head. It was not until dawn that he managed to close his eyes for a little while.

For three nights in succession, he heard the moaning, watched the moon, and reminisced.

His usual routine of eating and sleeping had been disrupted, there were dark circles around his eyes, and his face grew pale. Once he caught a glimpse of himself in a mirror and was a little startled by what he saw. He still went to work mechanically every day – but his otherwise empty mind had been invaded by the late-night patient.

On the seventh morning, he suddenly asked Granny Cheng who the patient was. Granny Cheng was surprised, but answered readily, “It’s Luer, the boy who does the shopping for the kitchen. He went shopping the other day and broke his leg. God knows how it happened. Anyway he managed to get a plaster and apply it to the broken leg. Still, it hurts. That’s why he’s been moaning night after night. It’s such a shame, he’s only twelve, a hard-working kid, kind and considerate” He Bin put on his coat and hat, and made for the door as if he had heard nothing. Seeing this, Granny Cheng stopped talking. She picked up the dirty dishes and made to leave, when He Bin slowly took a bank note out of his pocket and gave it to her.

“Give it to Luer, and tell him to see a doctor.” Having said this, he left without looking back. Granny Cheng was utterly amazed when she saw how much it was. So, even Mr He could be moved to pity. Would wonders never cease! She stood beside the door, dirty dishes in hand, musing.

The moaning died down and the moon waned. But He Bin was still caught up in reveries – his loving mother, stars in the sky, flowers in the garden His mind was exhausted and he tried his utmost to shut out such thoughts, but they kept crowding into his head.

Days passed. The moaning finally stopped. The night grew silent again, and He

Bin was again "lost in dreamless sleep". The musings of the previous nights soon faded, like faint moonlight shining on the peak of an iceberg at dawn.

Granny Cheng brought Luer to He Bin's door and tried to express their thanks to him on several occasions. But he seemed to have forgotten. He looked up indifferently, shook his head and went on reading. Luer almost burst into tears as he turned his dark round face upward and gazed at him from outside the door.

That day at dinner time He Bin told Granny Cheng that he had been transferred to another office and would be leaving the next day. He asked her to make out his bill. She was very disappointed, for quiet tenants like him were rare. But she couldn't ask him to stay and gave him her prompt congratulations. He nodded slightly, and then quickly turned to pack his books.

He was so tired that he went to bed soon after. Suddenly he heard his door-handle turn a few times, then a sound as if someone was pushing the door open. He neither spoke nor moved, but just lay quietly in his bed. In a little while silence reigned again.

The next day he busied himself packing behind closed doors. Granny Cheng offered to help, but he turned her down, saying that he would ask her if he really needed anything. After she had gone downstairs, he suddenly remembered that he had forgotten to buy some rope. He opened the door slowly and saw someone flash past. Looking closer he found Luer hiding behind the opposite door. He Bin hesitated, looking around. There were no servants about. He then turned to Luer.

"Go and buy me some rope, Luer." Luer came forward hesitantly, then took the money happily and flew downstairs.

Before long, Luer returned. His face was flushed from running and he was panting. He had some rope in one hand, the other he kept behind his back, where something flashed golden yellow. As he handed over the rope, he raised his head and seemed to be about to say something. He began to bring his other hand forward, but He Bin took no notice of it. He took the rope and went in.

His packing done, he clasped his hands and took a look round the room. It was empty now. He lay down, but felt extremely hot, so he got up again and opened both the door and the window a little. A cool breeze blew about the room.

"Still so hot. My brain seems crowded with too many thoughts, and the room seems too empty and silent. - I've been working hard for two days, it's natural that my routine should be upset. But why should I think of the midnight patient? - My loving ..., oh, no, forget it. How tiresome!"

The gentle breeze lifted the hair on his forehead, dried the drops of sweat on his face, and slowly wafted him into a dream.

White walls on four sides, a ceiling of twilight, and dark shadows in the corners of the room. Time is passing, minute by minute.

Loving mother, stars in the sky and flowers in the garden. Stop thinking, - ti...re...some....

Dark shadows mount slowly to the ceiling and nothing can be seen now. Time is passing, minute by minute.

The wind is strengthening. The walls begin to shine. Stars are dancing aimlessly into the room. With the starlight, a lady in white strolls in, holding her skirt with her

right hand and pressing her left to her forehead. She approaches, bringing a whiff of fragrance with her. Gradually she bends down to watch him, and stays there, watching motionlessly – her look full of love.

My nerves have gone numb! Get up. I can't. This is the cradle. Oh, I am in the cradle! Mother – my loving mother.

Oh, Mother! I want to get up and lie in your arms. Please take me into your arms and let me lie there.

Oh, Mother! We are bound together, we shall never abandon each other.

She begins to recede now, her look still full of love. She is fading. Stars are falling like drops of rain, floating across to gather in the shadows in the corner of the room.

“Don't go, Mother! Please, don't go ...”

The love that had lain buried for over a decade showed again in his face, and tears pent up for over a decade rolled down his cheeks like strings of pearls.

The fragrance lingered, the lady in white was still a presence in the room. He opened his eyes slightly and saw only white walls on four sides, the ceiling of twilight, and dark shadows in the corners of the room, which were sending forth the fragrance. He had started to move when he became aware of a child tiptoeing out of the room. As the child reached the doorway he turned. It was the midnight patient – Luer.

He Bin struggled to sit up. There was a basket of golden flowers on the stack of books. He went over to it in his pyjamas. There, underneath the flower basket, was a piece of paper with words scrawled on it. He read the letter in the dim light.

I don't know how to repay your kindness to me. I looked in at your door several times, and found there were no flowers on your desk. – We've got many florists here, I wonder if you have ever seen them. – The flowers in this basket, I don't know what to call them, but I grew them. They have a sweet smell, and I like them best. I believe you will like them too. I wanted to give them to you long ago, but never got the chance. Yesterday I was told you were leaving, so I brought them here at once.

I'm sure you won't want them. But I have a mother, who is very grateful to you because she loves me. Have you got a mother too? I'm sure she loves you. So, your mother and my mother must be good friends. And you should accept this present from the son of your mother's friend.

Yours truly,

Luer

After he had read the letter, He Bin went over to the bed holding the flowers. He felt completely drained, and began to sob.

The fragrance still lingered, but Mother had gone. The moonlight and starlight shone through the window, reflecting off the tears of the man inside.

When Granny Cheng came into his room in the morning she saw that He Bin was already dressed. He was standing in front of the window with his back to her, his hat lowered over his eyes. With a smile, she asked him if he wanted some breakfast. He shook his head. –

The cab arrived, and all the luggage was carried downstairs. With a tear-stained face, He Bin nodded his thanks to Granny Cheng in silence, got into the cab and left, with the basket of flowers in his hand.

Luer stood beside Granny Cheng. They both looked amazed. They watched the cab until it disappeared in a cloud of dust in the distance. Granny Cheng then turned to Luer.

“Go and tidy up the room. Lock the door when you finish. The key is in the lock.”

There was nothing in the room except for a piece of paper on the bed. It was a letter.

Dear little friend Luer,

First of all I must humbly ask your forgiveness. My kindness was actually my evil crime. You said that you wanted to repay my kindness, but I don't know how to repay yours!

The sound of your moaning in the middle of the night reminded me of many things in my past, of which the first was my mother. Her love released feelings in me that had been stagnant for such a long time. For more than ten years I had wrongly thought that the world was empty, that human life was meaningless, and that love and sympathy were both evil. There was not a shade of love or sympathy about the money I offered you to see the doctor. It was only meant to stop your moaning, and, in fact, it was a denial of my mother, of the universe and life, and of love and sympathy. Oh, God! What ideas!

I must thank you again for what you have taught me in your innocence. My dear little friend! It is true that all mothers are good friends, and that all sons should be good friends, too. They are bound to each other, and they should never reject each other.

My mother had come to see me before you gave me that basket of flowers. She had brought me your love, to awaken me. I shall never forget your flowers and your love, and I hope that you will remember forever that your flowers and love were brought by your friend's mother.

I come from a jungle of crime and evil. I own nothing. I really do not have anything good enough to give you. – But I carry with me at this moment the light of my tears of repentance, the light of the crescent moon and the brilliant starlight. These are the only pure and unsullied things in the universe. I

would like to string the teardrops onto a fine silk thread and tie it to either end of the new crescent moon. Then I would like to gather all the stars in the sky and put them into the bow of the crescent moon. Wouldn't that be basket of golden flowers, too? Its sweet scent is a penitent's plea. Please accept it. It's the only thing good enough for me to give you.

It is now daybreak. I must go. I have nothing else to say, but thank you again, my dear little friend. Good-bye! Farewell! All the sons in the world are good friends. We are linked together forever!

Yours sincerely,

He Bin

P.S. I've written so much, and perhaps you may not understand it all. But you don't have to understand it all, for, honestly, you already know much much more than I do!

"Where's the basket of flowers he gave me then?" Luer turned his dark round face upward, and stared blankly into the sky.