

# Rising Dragon Temple

Su Tong / 苏童

A rain-drenched road desires calm, but traffic keeps pushing. Cars hurry across with an almost panic-like speed. This particular truck is just the same, like an exhausted fugitive gasping for breath running from the pursuit of the weather. The driver reaches to wind his window. The handle is broken, he curses. Spreading his palms on the window, he pats it, the glass drops down. The air outside is lead-grey. Some of the raindrops are aggressive, some gentle. The wipers feebly swing left and right, unable to prevent the irregular stream of water flowing down the windscreen. From the rear-view mirror the road looks like a tide of black water chasing the driver, the truck a lonely boat shaking in the storm. It cannot be said for certain what happened in this truck. As for the face in that rear-view mirror, pale and beaten, visible sweat is dripping down its forehead, and eyes that have been startled have not yet returned to a tranquil state. It cannot be said for certain what is hidden beneath.

The rain kept falling. Only after the truck had gone around a mountain pass did it become noticeably lighter and the noise of raindrops pounding corn leaves less rough, allowing the sound of the rushing river to be heard. The sky to the north was still dark. To the south it was already bluer than earlier, brighter than earlier. Up in front, on the left-hand side of the road, appeared a number of red brick bungalows. Vaguely visible was also a temple in mid-construction, rising from the cornfields. It appeared extraordinarily tall, yet credibly so. The driver knew he was at Rising Dragon Temple. He had passed here last year. The scaffolding was up then, as it was now. It still wasn't finished.

It wasn't that this was an auspicious place for people to burn incense and pray. The reason they were building a temple here was just so that the place, Rising Dragon Temple, could actually have a temple to speak of. The driver was familiar with the place. Like most drivers, he could map out where all the truck-drivers' roadside service stations are. The Rising Dragon Temple service station has three establishments; a petrol station; a general store selling cigarettes, alcohol and food, and what you wouldn't say for certain was either a hotel or an inn, the garish lights of its restaurant that tease custom from the road half-obscuring the accommodation behind it. The people from Rising Dragon Temple had told the driver that the three establishments were in fact one, run by the same woman. That proprietress, the drivers all called her Sister Rising Dragon.

A girl in a green miniskirt stood by the side of the road with one arm protruding enchantingly from underneath her flowery umbrella, as if she was about to inflict gentle violence on someone. She crossed one of her legs over the other. Half white and half black, her bare legs caught the driver's eye. He was compelled to take a proper look. She was wearing long black pop-socks, decorated with sparkling pearls. They looked like a starry night.

"Hello there! Come in and have a glass of water and rest your feet." The girl made a suggestive sign with her hands, and then

covered her embarrassed smile. The driver was of course used to these kinds of signals. He didn't immediately respond. His eyes were fixed on both the girl's face and the unpredictable flow of traffic on the roads. He looked hesitant. It was not his head but his hand that made the decision to stop. It let go of the handbrake. The driver followed his hand's lead. Suddenly his uptight body was resting on the steering wheel.

"Alright then," he said, "I could rest my feet for a bit and then set off again."

The driver thought he knew himself, but the girl had surprised him by helping him calm down so quickly. The driver thought it was strange. As he was reversing the truck to park he caught a glance of his own face reflected in the rear-view mirror. Although his complexion was very pale, his eyes had taken the lead in emitting a newly found life force, flashing forth rays of hidden anticipation and warm enthusiasm. The girl had a childish appearance. Her charming smile was a bit ingratiating, but she still seemed bashful. She concerned herself with the contents of the truck, standing on tiptoes to peek at what was in the dump-box. On seeing it was empty she was clearly disappointed.

"An empty truck? That guest who just left, he was tugging a whole truck full of Coca-Cola!"

"What of it?" The driver said. "It wasn't as if he was letting you drink it."

The girl did not seem to yet understand

how men flirt. She thought he was scoffing at her. She drew in her umbrella, spraying water around, and returned the compliment.

“Even if he gave it me I would hardly want it, it’s like coughed-up sugar water, disgusting.” Rising Dragon Temple still looked the same as last year, the mud ground in front of the buildings was still scarred by the tire-tracks. As soon as it rains there would appear dozens of large puddles and small ponds. Next to the shop wall, damp old truck tires were piled up like a mountain. Chickens reared by the restaurant doddered around the puddles, possibly looking for something to eat.

“Over this way!” The girl used her umbrella to direct the driver towards the restaurant. “This way, not that way! It’s soaking wet over there.”

“You think I can’t even navigate this path by myself? You don’t need to be quite so thorough,” said the driver, laughing. “For the moment anyway.”

“The first impression is very important,” said the girl. “Our proprietress cares a lot about it. Last month she went on a study trip to learn about successful service culture.”

“First impression? But I’m a regular customer. I’ve been here lots of times. How come I’ve never seen you before?” The driver leapt over a puddle, and suddenly he remembered the name of the girl last year, Little Snowflake. “Is Little Snowflake around?”

“Which Little Snowflake?” The girl’s

eyes lit up for a moment. “I am Little Snowflake. Do you know me?”

“I don’t know you. The Little Snowflake I know has a round face, short hair. She’s a bit plumper than you, and darker-skinned than you. Is she still working here?”

“I’m the only Little Snowflake working here. How could there be so many different Little Snowflakes? What did she do here?”

“The same as you. She stood here to lure in clients.”

“That can’t be right! I’ve been here for over a year. I’m the only Little Snowflake here, how could there be another?” The girl seemed to think she was being made fun of. Turning around, she looked at the driver’s face, and then at his shoes. She suddenly called out.

“Oh no, Look at your shoes! They’re filthy. I told you to be careful where you walk. You didn’t listen to me and now look at the state of them. Covered in mud!” But the driver didn’t care about the mud on his shoes. His brow was furrowing as he tried hard to remember clearly.

“That’s weird, I don’t think I would have remembered wrongly. That Little Snowflake had a mole right there on her chin, and you don’t have one, do you? Or are all girls here called Little Snowflake? Is your name actually Little Snowflake?”

“Of course we’re not all called Little Snowflake! How would that work? That would put everyone in a muddle. It would be

unmanageable. No, we have a Little Plum, Little Tinkle and a Little Jolie that all come in the evening. In the daytime it's just me." She raised her voice. "I promise that I am actually Little Snowflake, cross my heart and hope to die."

The driver was a little puzzled. He felt sure he could not have got the Little Snowflake of Rising Dragon Temple's mixed up with any other. He trusted his own memory, but even his company colleagues would agree that there are two things he is especially good at remembering. One being the road, and the other the names of the girls he chanced upon. The proprietress came bustling through from behind the motel carrying a bunch of sunflower seeds in her hand, her boney face covered in a thick layer of foundation, lips painted red, revealing her blackened and uneven teeth whenever she smiled.

"Long time no see!" her eyes sparkled at seeing the driver. She poked his shoulder with her finger. "You travelling merchants are the most wicked. Served you so well last time and you still forgot all about big sister's business." Even though she said that, the driver didn't dare believe that Rising Dragon Sister genuinely recognized him. Maybe she remembered, maybe she didn't. He had heard a lot of that sort of talk at roadside service stations.

"That's how it is!" He laughed submissively and sat down at the table. "I'll have two fried dishes, and a bowl of pork

and kale noodles." Near the kitchen there were two men sitting around a cardboard box playing poker. They cast a glance at him then buried themselves back in their game. The driver had never seen them before. He guessed Rising Dragon Sister employed them in some manner. In any of the roadside service stations you could see these sorts of idlers, always sitting. It was always the women who are actually moving around doing things.

The reception was next to the entrance, painted pink. Above it was mounted a black-and-white television. The girl who had called herself Little Snowflake switched it on as soon as she came back inside. The television was old. It made a buzzing sound but there was still no picture. The girl grabbed a flip-flop and whacked the set on the left and right-hand sides. Suddenly it came to life, showing a Hong Kong soap opera. A man and a woman were speaking in strange, dated Mandarin back and forth to each other one line at a time. He listened for a moment, curious to know what they could possibly be talking about like that. Apparently they were talking about their feelings. Absent-mindedly he looked at the television set, then at the window. He chatted with Little Snowflake.

"I've been in a muddle since I got here. Why is this place called Rising Dragon Temple? Did there use to be a temple here?" Little Snowflake noticeably hardened her attention on the television set, and, unwilling to discuss the driver's question, it was left

to the two men player poker to pick up the thread. One of them said that there was once a Rising Dragon Temple here that was completely burnt down out of existence during the Guangxu reign of the Qing Dynasty.

“Not completely,” said the other. “There is still a mound of bricks, and in the past people from the village would raise pigs there.”

“Raise pigs?” The driver laughed. “Smart of them to think of that!” he joked. “So where is the pile of bricks? Is it where they are now building the temple? Are they going to use the same bricks?” Suddenly animated with anger, the thin man shot him a glance.

“They were all bloody stolen! Apparently there was someone in the city making a business out of selling old bricks, one brick for more than 10 *yuan* each.”

At the reception desk Little Snowflake started protesting,

“Can you guys speak a little quieter please, I’m trying to watch the television. It’s the last two episodes and I can’t hear a thing.” The proprietress came in from the kitchen and kicked the cardboard box between the two men.

“Still just playing poker! Can’t you come into the kitchen and help chop vegetables?” By the time she had walked over to the driver her face had become friendly.

“You see how difficult it is to do a bit

of business these days,” she said. “Workers are so lazy, I’m always busy but they have enough time to play poker and watch television.”

“I can’t listen to that television,” said that driver through a yawn. “As soon as I hear it I begin to feel sleepy.” The proprietress started blinking her eyes in alarm, scrutinizing the driver’s face, “Big brother, you’re looking a bit pale,” she began fussing. “Look how pale your complexion is! You need to rest up. How long have you been driving? You’re exhausted, aren’t you!” He looked at the proprietress, shaking his head, slanting in the chair and smiling at her with an indistinct expression.

“Are you okay, brother?” asked the proprietress, putting her hand on the driver’s forehead. “Well, you’re not burning up. Thank heaven, as long as you’re not ill. It’s not easy staking your health to go out and make money. Is that not right, brother? I can see you’re tired, you need to rest up a little.”

“It’s not tiredness,” the driver replied, “I’ll tell you straight out. It’s shock. There was an accident in front of the temple.”

“An accident! Who was in it?” The proprietress became suddenly agitated. She took a step back. “You weren’t hurt, were you?”

“If I’d been hurt would I be sitting here? Anyway it wasn’t me,” said the driver, his two legs trembling underneath the table. “What are you all staring at me for? It wasn’t me. It was the driver of the coal truck in front

of me.”

“Coal trucks are always wild. Coal drivers all have a screw loose, almost as if they deliberately crashed into people,” continued the proprietress, demonstrating the appropriate measure of interest in the accident. “Did you see the driver crash into someone with your own eyes? Who was it that got hit?”

“It was an old man. I saw him blow up like a firecracker. The coal truck was right in front of my truck, having just overtaken me. I saw him hit the guy. There was a heavy bang, like a damn firecracker! I’ve been driving for this many years, but it’s the first time I’ve seen a guy get hit with my own eyes. That old guy flew up like a firecracker!”

“Then why don’t you hurry up and save him, there’s a small hospital in the village in front of the temple.”

“Save him? The driver who hit him didn’t even get out of his truck. The bastard. He just went off! I was right behind him. I didn’t want to drive on, but it would have been dangerous for me not to. I had to grit my teeth and carry on forward. I hadn’t imagined the guy could still be alive, but then as I drove past he suddenly sat up, covered in blood, implicating my truck.” The proprietress let out a shriek.

“How could he possibly still be alive? Is he still alive now?”

“How would I know? I was already practically dead from shock.” The driver started picking at his food, and chewing on

something.

“I expect he won’t have lasted. He came onto the road from the fields. It was raining. Raindrops bigger than soya beans! Visibility was bad. Old peasant men like him don’t have good reactions, and they all walk along the road with their heads down looking at the ground. Damn it! It’s like the national highways were built for them alone. The guy was carrying a wicker basket on his back filled with red chili peppers. When he was struck it really was like a firecracker, bursting up in the air in all directions. I’m not kidding, the guy and the chili peppers all launched into the air, just like a big firecracker!” The driver’s speech had become excited. Over at reception Little Snowflake started to protest again.

“Please can you lot be a bit quieter? I can’t hear anything. Miss Fang is writing a farewell letter, and she’s about to kill herself!” The proprietress stared at Little Snowflake. She had originally intended to tell her off but her attention was also drawn to the television screen. It became obvious her real concern was also in the unfolding soap opera.

“I thought Miss Fang had already been killed off in the last episode!” she said. “How can they have dragged her suicide note on till today?” She smiled at the driver, as if to apologize. “This series is really good, I watch it everyday.” She leant down and whispered in his ear, “Big sister will sort you out. I’ll get our Little Snowflake to go

next-door and give you a little massage, help you relax. She's not bad looking, our Little Snowflake!" The driver hesitated for a moment.

"She wants to watch the program, let her watch it. I'll just go next-door and have a little nap. I'll be fine."

"Just a little nap! That's no good." The proprietress affectionately pushed the driver. "Don't you worry. When you are this tired you should relax properly, and when you are in the hands of Rising Dragon Sister, nothing's a problem. You come to a place for its reputation! I'll sort you out." The driver looked over at the girl in front of the television, and then out at the window. The rain had stopped for a while, and had now started again. He couldn't see any traffic outside. The road in the rain looked still, like a black flowing river, reflecting here and there a glitter of light. He could see a chicken belonging to the restaurant, or was it a duck, taking a leisurely walk onto the road.

"When is the temple going to be ready?" mumbled the driver. The proprietress didn't hear him. She was already sitting in front of the television with an anxious expression on her face, her mouth puffing up to spit out the sunflower seed shells. Little Snowflake had now gone to sit up by the reception desk. Apart from a few golden embroidered flowers on her black silk stockings, the driver could only see her side and back. The shape of her breasts was carefully hidden from view inside her

sleeveless top. It made him think of that other Little Snowflake. Maybe it really was the same girl? Maybe he remembered wrongly what she looked like. Having been a long distance truck driver for so many years, he'd known too many different girls in roadside establishments to keep track. But what really perplexed him was this Little Snowflake's attitude towards him. If it really was that same one, she should at least be able to recognize him.

Last year at Rising Dragon Temple, that tearful countryside girl who didn't understand anything of life was brought to him like a sacrificial lamb to the slaughterhouse for just 80 *yuan*. He didn't do anything to her. Her tearfulness and resignation to her fate had made his heart go out to her. And even though he didn't do anything he gave her the money anyway. He even gave her a tip. He remembered that Little Snowflake clumsily kissing him on the cheek to express her gratitude. "Big brother, I won't ever forget you, my whole life. You're a good man," she had said. Of course he was a good man: he hadn't done anything to her but still paid. He had felt satisfied with himself for that. He was sure that Little Snowflake from Rising Dragon Temple would have remembered him. The current situation was doubly disappointing. She didn't recognize him, and he wasn't even sure if he recognized her.

The rooms at the inn were simple and crude. There was an old-style wooden bed, a washing basin on a stand. The walls

were covered in posters of Hong Kong and Taiwanese superstars. On the floor was spread a plastic carpet that had just been washed and was slippery to step on. The driver saw a mosquito curtain, something rarely seen now in big cities, hanging from the ceiling over the bed. He felt somewhat intimate. He couldn't remember there was one here when he passed the Rising Dragon Temple last year. Maybe it was because it was autumn then. He squeezed into the mosquito curtain and touched all about him. The bedding seemed clean enough. It had been sprayed with perfume. He slowly lay down on his back and breathed a heavy sigh. He knew what the proprietress was going to arrange for him and what he was waiting for. As he lay there he combed his hair with his fingers. This was different from previous times in small roadside establishments. This time he had a heavy heart. What was he waiting for? What was he doing there at all?

Little Snowflake came into the room with a thermos of hot water. It was obvious that she was not at all willing to come but that the proprietress had forced her to. The smile on her face appeared stiff.

"A little wash first," she said, standing outside the mosquito curtain. "The proprietress told to get you to have a wash."

"What do you want me to wash, exactly?" asked the driver. "You want me to wash my feet?" Little Snowflake stood there leaning her body to one side, saying nothing. Her attitude had made it obvious she had

been forced to come and serve the driver. "Come on. Speak up! What is it you want me to wash?" The driver stuck his head of the mosquito curtain to look at Little Snowflake. Seeing that she wasn't willing to respond, he shrunk back in. "I won't wash, I'm not dirty. What's all this washing nonsense about anyway?"

"It's up to you," said Little Snowflake, "if you don't care about hygiene that's your business. So I'll just explain the situation to you clearly, I'm not on the evening shift so I don't do that kind of service."

"Don't do what kind of service?" The driver laughed. He had never come across a girl like this before. "You don't seem to do anything. What are you in a place like this for? Call in your boss for me."

"I'm not calling her in. And anyway I haven't wronged my customer." Her voice had warmed up all of a sudden. She wanted to argue her case. She put the thermos bottle next to the bed and appeared to be thinking something over, and then hesitantly, she said,

"Big brother, if you're not willing to wash, that's fine. I'll wash your feet for you. I'll scratch your itches too, but you just have to agree to one condition. Is that okay?"

"How come you're so much trouble? I'm just here to relax, not to have a serious relationship. What is this condition?"

"Fifteen minutes," said Little Snowflake, "I just do fifteen minutes. Is that all right? And then I need to go next door and watch television. But you can't tell the

proprietress.”

“No way!” Having discovered what was on Little Snowflake’s mind, he couldn’t help but laugh. Imitating the girl’s voice, he said: “Impossible. How am I supposed to relax in 15 minutes? How about I pay half the price then?”

“Come on, big brother, please just do me this one favor. Today is the last two episodes. After 10 minutes of adverts it’s going to start again. I have to see the final episode. Please let me! Will you?”

“Absolutely not!” said the driver, now in a high pitch. “You seem to think you can treat me like an animal? Huh?” A thought passed through his mind. “Well, come on then. Hurry up and we’ll do ten minutes! Why did you want to do fifteen?”

“The first five minutes is the theme tune,” said Little Snowflake, cheering up now realizing she had been accommodated. “Big brother, you’re a good man! I knew you were a good person. I’ll remember your goodness for the rest of my life.” The driver laughed.

“You said the same thing last year! What exactly are girls like you capable of remembering? Money is all you remember.”

“What do you mean? If you want to be unfriendly again then fine.” Little Snowflake became lifeless, as if she couldn’t move her hands and feet. Her hand that had lifted the mosquito curtain now shrunk back. “What are you even talking about? What girls like me?” She tilted her head to one side, looked

at a poster on the wall, and whispered: “If you think I’m not good enough, I’m not going to beg to serve you. You can say what you like to the proprietress, I’m not afraid. I don’t know what your problem is!”

“You dare insult me?”

“How have I insulted you?”

“You said I have a problem.”

“That doesn’t count as an insult. Our pay gets docked if we insult customers. Big brother, you’re not going to incriminate me, are you?”

“How old actually are you? How come that you don’t understand anything? How could you come out into the world to make money with no understanding of it at all?” He stared at the girl. “Are you really not Little Snowflake?” His tone was now serious and playful at the same time. “Do you honestly not remember me? Last year I came by here. You were in tears, like Lin Daiyu from *A Dream of Red Mansions*. I didn’t lay a finger on you and yet still paid up. You kept saying that you would remember me for the rest of your life. It’s not even been one year since then. Do you really not remember me? I’m called Lin, big brother Lin!”

Little Snowflake turned her head. This self-introduction had grabbed her attention. She pulled the mosquito curtain across to reveal a small slit. She wanted to look at the driver’s face, but she was also embarrassed. She sat down suddenly on the edge of the bed. She looked as if she was trying very hard to remember something. She was sitting

on top of her hands, tucked under her body, rocking from one side to another, as if her body was trying to help her mind remember.

Eventually she just shook her head.

“No. If you had really done such a good thing, how could I possibly not remember you? You’re obviously trying to trick me. You drivers all like to play with people’s minds. Big brother Liu, I don’t recognise you.”

“What do you mean big brother Liu? Are you illiterate too? My name is Lin, L-I-N, big brother Lin.”

“Fine. Big brother Lin, calm down. So this time you’ve already agreed to be kind to me. Next time I’ll be certain to remember.”

“If you don’t remember it’s fine. Shit, it’s not like I counting on you to remember me!”

The driver sat up impatiently, and then lay down again. Suddenly he laughed, and said,

“Well come on then! Aren’t you in a rush to watch your television? If you want to catch the last episode, you’re to work quickly. But I’m feeling a little upset and tired and it may not even take the full ten minutes!” The driver saw one of Little Snowflake’s legs came inside the mosquito curtain. The other leg hesitated, but finally it came in too. The driver didn’t look at her face. He didn’t know why he didn’t want to look her face. He let out a sigh and cursed in a low voice.

He lifted his eyes to look outside the

mosquito curtain at the ceiling. The mosquito curtain was made from white cloth, but over time had become somewhat yellowish. Through the white cloth, the driver could vaguely see a bunch of red chili peppers hanging from the rafters.

“What’s that hanging there?” he said. “Are those red chilies?” The driver’s body started to tremble. Unconsciously he looked out of the mosquito curtain again. It seemed like there was a person there. He could vaguely make out an old man outside of the curtain, sitting on the floor, holding a bunch of red chili peppers in his hand, his face covered in blood. The driver’s hand now started to tremble, stalling in mid-air. He flipped over onto his front, and the desire that had been swelling inside his body started to fade away and fear alone took over his heart. He suddenly let go of Little Snowflake’s hand and kicked her off the bed.

“Don’t waste time massaging me. Go and watch your television,” shouted the driver. This time Little Snowflake was really frightened; she hadn’t expected any sudden violence from him and didn’t know how to deal with it. She stood outside the curtain in her bare feet. First in a daze, she then picked up her green sandals from the floor.

“What was that about? What’s wrong with you?” She began crying, and ran outside the room carrying her sandals in her hands. “What’s wrong with all you people? Stinking, shameless hooligans! I’m not going to serve any of you!” The driver could hear the girl’s

footsteps hurriedly disappear to somewhere far, crying as if she had suffered the worst treatment imaginable. But the driver also felt aggrieved. How had something so normal turned into something so complicated? He hadn't imagined it would have turned out like this. He didn't know what he was even doing at Rising Dragon Temple. He didn't even know why he had come here. He soon heard the proprietress' shouting and the sound of several people stomping down the corridor. He swiftly sat up and went to lock the door.

As the proprietress was knocking on the door, the driver could hear the two poker-playing men discussing something in hushed voices. He called out,

"Stop knocking. Nothing happened. You go and watch television. I'll have my little sleep and then get back on the road. How much money do I owe? You say however much, it's fine."

"Big brother, you need to tell me what actually happened in there. If you don't I don't know how to deal with it. I know that Little Snowflake is too naïve and stubborn for this kind of work. I already spoke to her family to come and pick her up. If she has offended you somehow, be accommodating, ok? Wait till this evening when Little Plum and the others get here and everything will be fine. If there's any other service you require let me know and we'll do our best to accommodate."

"I don't want any service. I just want a little sleep." The driver could smell the

strong scent of the proprietress's perfume through the door and all of a sudden couldn't stand it. Pinching his nose with his fingers he walked over to the only window in the room. He opened the curtains. Outside was a large cornfield, a cornfield just after the rain. It was half green and half yellow. The corn leaves were still covered in glistening raindrops. Looking west along the small road separating the fields, he could see the tower of that half-built temple. It looked like a huge sophisticated model built from building blocks, standing in the field, half red and half yellow. Everything was drenched. The corn was so wet it gave off a smell of alcohol. The driver suddenly felt intoxicated. He noticed underneath the scaffolding a group of strange white shapes moving around. He was frightened, but then realized they were in fact just goats. He settled down again. Just a trip of white goats grazing on the construction site, and the goat herder must have had no idea where they had gone. There was also a white object that had climbed up the scaffolding. It looked like a sentinel looking towards the inn, but the driver could see that it wasn't a person at all but an animal. Another little white goat!

The driver actually did want to sleep, even if for just ten minutes. He felt exhausted, like he was about to collapse. Before getting back inside the mosquito curtain, he walked over to the basin and gave his hands a good wash with the hot water. He found his hands were rather dirty with diesel

fuel and dirt stuck in the fingernails. By habit he reached into his pocket to grab a tissue, but all his tissues had been used up and he pulled out only an empty plastic packet. But it felt like something else had come out with the tissue packet and softly fallen on to the ground. What petrified him most happened next. He saw a red chili pepper fly out from his pocket. It lay on the inn's artificial fabric carpet, its solemn dark red color flashing at him.

Rising Dragon Temple at night is another world. The small, delicate business becomes a hive of prosperity. That day's rain had dragged on all way into the night, raining a little, stopping, and then starting again. The lights of the temple shone out through the rain. Maybe it was because of the bad weather, or maybe because an accident on the road had interrupted the drivers' journeys, but that evening Rising Dragon Temple was buzzing. Altogether there were 17 drivers staying that night. The restaurant's few tables were all full, and the lights of all the rooms at the inn were alit. The proprietress was beaming, shuttling around a host of mini-skirted young girls doing her business. Among the 17 drivers was a young man called Li who drove an oil tank truck. He knew Little Snowflake and looked for her amid the group of girls. He couldn't find her. He asked the proprietress about her. He asked a number of times, but she was constantly rushing around, and each time told him to wait for a moment. He waited. He didn't

drink. He didn't speak to any of the other drivers. He had waited for some time before the proprietress finally came to him with a shocking piece of news.

"This is very unlucky timing," she said, "Little Snowflake had some problems at home, something happened in her family just today. Her father was coming to pick her up, and on the road on his way he was hit by a truck."

"Is it that accident in front of the temple?" Li was dumbfounded. He suddenly thought of something. "The scene is closed off. I heard the driver did a runner."

"How could he not? Look, Little Snowflake hadn't even finished eating her dinner by the time the police were here." She pointed at the plastic rice bowl on the reception. "You see! She left her dinner there."

For a moment Li seemed at a complete loss. He opened his mouth to talk but didn't know what to say. The proprietress slapped him on his shoulders. "Look at your silly face, it's not like it was you that hit him. What are you nervous for?"

"Who was it that did hit him?" A flash of alarm passed across the proprietress's eyes, and then they were almost immediately empty of expression. She seemed to want to tell him something, but finally dismissed the idea.

"How would I know? If I knew I'd have the bastard tied up." She was waving her hands indistinctly in the air. She slapped

him on the shoulders again and said, “You just stop doting on Little Snowflake alright? She’s dense and stupid. What’s so special about her?” She leant down and whispered into his ear. “In a moment I’ll get Little Tinkle to look after you. She’s our model worker, not just pretty, but with a college diploma. She’ll satisfy you.”

Li was a well-behaved young man. He noticed the two people drinking together at the table opposite had started winking at him. He blushed. Picking up his bowl to drink his noodle soup, his eyes jumped to the scene outside the window. He saw a number of trucks parked there under the pink lights of Rising Dragon Temple, like a navy anchored in a torch-lit harbor. After the rainstorm had passed, Rising Dragon Temple was submerged in a big puddle of water. So many trucks, lit up by pink lights. Just like a pink navy floating in the water.

Translated by Kim Gordon