

MINESHAFT, OUR BLACK HOME

(For the Victims of Mining Accidents)

BY QIU YUESHOU

Whether you're sitting in a comfortable room,
Surrounded by fresh flowers and fine wine,
Or whether you're squatting in an open field,
Buffeted by cold winds and icy rain;
Whether you've settled into your preferred station in life,
Or are a migrant fleeing the police;
Whether your neck is adorned with a Goldlion tie
Or with a placard scrawled with your grievances,
In reality we are all coal miners;
The mineshaft is our common home.

We're all together in a long, long tunnel
Digging ourselves into an endless darkness.
From the time of our grandfathers' grandfathers,
It's hard to say how many years we've spent digging.
Gradually we've dug our eyes black,
Dug our hair black,
Dug ourselves a black home.

In the boundless, limitless blackness
We have the choice of only one color,
And only one black song,
Which we've sung until we're hoarse.

Let others say what they will,
We simply cannot believe we're stupid.
Let people on the earth above write their great literature;
Look—we're using blood and coal
To write a Chinese version of *The Red and the Black* that will shake
the world.

We have a million ways to consol ourselves
Braided into a silken cord twisting tipsily in the breeze;
Along the hempen rope of words our ancestors wove for us

We lightheartedly walk toward the rosy sunset.
Gradually we've learned to appear deaf and mute;
Conforming with the bandits' trajectory of lies
We cheerfully glide toward the carnage of battle.
Little by little we've learned artifice and cunning.

A thug's hand
Smears our faces black
And our own hand
Uses a cinder to blind our eyes.

Still, in our effort to stand,
Our heads hit the ceiling
And our crowns split open and bloom with blood.
Still, for the sake of living,
We turn our hands into feet
And crawl laboriously along the ground.

In the human communities of this earth
Our distant cousins have long bathed in the light of freedom,
While the fields of our neighbors and close relatives
Are beginning to be washed with spring showers.

Let us raise our heavy pickaxes
And smash through the thick wall of despair;
Open a great breach
That lets in clear water
To cleanse our black home;
Break through the thick partition
And let the wails from the bottoms of our hearts resound to
heaven —
We want a new home.

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Translated by Stacy Mosher

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