**READ PAPER REPUBLIC presents…**

**“That Damned Thing She Said”**

**by FU Yuli, translated by Nicky Harman**

*“For two years, he hasn’t touched me.” As the words slipped out, her eyes filled with tears.* “That damned thing she said” sparks a series of events which culminate in a slightly awkward seduction scene in a hotel bedroom. Xiangxiang, childless and estranged from her husband although they still live together, meets Bun-face, an old friend whom she remembers from the days, long ago, when she used to travel on his train to visit her then-boyfriend. Pleased to see a familiar face now, she starts to chat…and finds herself spilling the beans about her awful loveless existence.

What I loved about this story is that, although outwardly nothing very much happens, it is extraordinarily rich and nuanced in the description of her memories and her feelings. Angry, gentle, subservient, aggressive, complex, contradictory, Xiangxiang is all of these things. Ms Fu does not bang us over the head with a message about women and one-night-stands. The shift in the couple’s relationship, when it happens, is very subtle. Instead, she takes us on a journey of exploration through Xiangxiang’s emotions. Xiangxiang is everywoman here. Of all the four stories we chose, I think this is most universal and has the least “Chinese-ness”. Do you agree? [NH]

More info: <https://paper-republic.org/pubs/read/>

**READ PAPER REPUBLIC presents…**

**“Mahjong”**

**by FENG Tang, translated by Brendan O’Kane**

When to marry and who to marry? Too early and maybe you’ll miss your best chance. Too late and maybe you’ll miss them all.

Shang Shu is a high-flyer. She aced school, breezed through university (the elite Tsinghua, naturally), and having mastered management consultancy is bound for business school (Harvard, of course.) But this is China, and she knows if she doesn’t find a husband soon she’ll high-fly right on to the shelf. And in a world where men marry slightly down, what are the options for a woman at the very top? Deciding such important matters cannot be left to the emotionally-stunted Shang Shu herself, so her gossip-hungry colleagues take it upon themselves to help her brainstorm solutions and implement strategies. Shang Shu, though, finds herself opting for some rather blue-sky thinking.

The consummate chronicler of youth in Beijing, Feng Tang is the author of a series of novels deeply evocative of growing up in the Chinese capital during the 1990s, immensely popular with readers who were a certain age at a certain time.

More info: <https://paper-republic.org/pubs/read/mahjong/>

**READ PAPER REPUBLIC presents…**

**“Missing”**

**by LI Jingrui, translated by Helen Wang**

What would you do if your husband went missing — “officially missing” — for a few months? And then turned up as randomly as he disappeared?

This story imagines the life of the young wife, all alone and desperate to know what has happened to her husband. The events of those months — the arrival of the black envelope, the offer of help from an old friend, and the disappearance of that friend — are never fully explained, nor do we find out what happened to her husband. It is the story of how she deals with the horror of the unknown. She carries on as normally as she can in the abnormal circumstances, finding comfort in the familiar routines of everyday life, but all the time looking for clues and leads in everything around her, questioning the past as well as the present.

Li Jingrui comments, “The story is political, but not overtly so. In China today, Kafka-esque situations are all too real. I wanted to show that when facing unassailable horror, we react with weakness and cowardice, but also with untold courage, and that even if that courage is eventually swallowed up in the darkness, it was most definitely there.”

More info: <https://paper-republic.org/pubs/read/missing/>

**READ PAPER REPUBLIC presents…**

**“The One Who Picks Flowers”**

**by LIU Qingbang, translated by Lee Yew Leong**

The mine’s canteen has a new worker: the beautiful Song Tian’er. So beautiful she is known by all the miners as “the one who picks flowers”. And every man who sees her lines up, hoping for a chance to be the one who plucks the flower-picker. Even though they know they don’t stand a chance.

When the mine boss catches sight of Song Tian’er, he makes an indecent proposal. Not directly of course, but via Song Tian’er’s sister in law. Will the flower-picker accept the big boss? And if she doesn’t, what will the repercussions be, for her, for her sister in law, for her brother, for the canteen?

The author Liu Qingbang was once a miner, now a writer. His work about mines and the mining community is well-known throughout China and his novella *Sacred Wood* was turned into the award-winning 2003 film *Blind Shaft*.

"The most frequent motifs of literature, such as the relationships between men and nature, men and death, and men and women, are brought into full play … underground,” says Liu of his work.

More info: <https://paper-republic.org/pubs/read/the-one-who-picks-flowers-1/>