

Long Day's Journey Into Night

At three o'clock in the morning, I woke up from my dreams.

My whole body was wrapped with the steam of hot gas, and water splashed out under my bed. Sure enough, the repairman I found was not reliable. The hot water pipe that was fixed yesterday cracked again.

I woke up and jumped out of bed, too lazy to wear my shoes. Heading to the living room, picking up a rag, and returning to wrap it around the broken pipe, I was so familiar with the whole process. The injured pipe seemed to be comforted. It gradually suppressed the sound of sniffles in grievance. Only a drop of water still dripped quietly.

With a deep sigh, rolling over into bed, I repositioned myself and closed my eyes.

But I could no longer fall asleep.

Because the clock on the wall started complaining again, in an explicit way, Tick, tock, tick, tock, tick. Each time the hands walked, they drove off my drowsiness a little more. The anxiety of the minute hand chasing the second hand spread in the empty room.

The window was not well-closed, and there was a bit of coolness running in the crevice. I wrapped the quilt and pressed the corners under my feet. This kind of sleeping position is always very safe to me, with the warmth of being wrapped inside the swaddling clothes felt like where I was born to be, in my mother's arms. I saw the faint light and shadow bounce on the ceiling like the artwork painted on the dome of a church.

It was a night not dark enough to be called a night, especially in the city place. There are always lights that refuse to go out late at night, and very few of them really need to be turned on.

It is as if people were in a silent conflict between light and the laws of nature: an attempt to prolong the wasted hours in the morning by making artificial daytime, and to render the night virtually another wasted day.

A wasted night again, as it did not provide enough sleep.

Yet on this night, sleepless, I tried to exploit one of its other values.

Such as, reminiscing about the past days.

At eleven o'clock in the morning, I opened the refrigerator door.

Two eggs leaned against half of a leftover salmon from yesterday. After looking around, at the bottom of a cupboard, I carried out a package of instant noodles, a quarter of which was crushed.

I threw the noodles into a pot full of boiling water. It struggled for a few seconds and then slowly sank down to the bottom. The noodles sacrificed themselves in a glorious way, for they were drowned by the hot water symbolizing the happiness of making food edible. Just as human beings sacrificed all themselves to works, which turn them into a seemingly decent look but made them forget who they originally were.

The waiting time is always hard to bear. I was waiting for the noodles to be edible. In that short five minutes, I could actually do a lot of things, such as giving myself a drink, trimming the messy plants on the balcony, or taking the dried clothes down and folding them into my closet. However, I chose not to do anything. I just stood in front of the pot and watched the white steam spread over the lid, then condense into uneven droplets that fell back into the water again. The

little pot formed a microsystem of life's circulation, as if to show that people are living in circular patterns all day round, and coming from the place where they are supposed to go to.

Albert Camus once said, the greatest meaning of life is to take the courage of facing a meaningless life. I don't think I dare to endure lifelong meaninglessness, but in those five minutes, those five minutes doing nothing, my life seemed to have five minutes of meaning. I moved the ready noodles from the pot to a porcelain bowl, which looked particularly bleak in all white. I tried to decorate it to look delicious, covered it with poached eggs, spread it with salmon fillets, and finally garnished it with greens along the sides of the bowl. But it still could not change the fate of being eaten, even though it looked more decent.

Sitting down and not in a hurry to eat, I took out my phone then took a picture of my lunch. Still not eating, I started to edit the picture: Choose the most efficient photo editing app, cropped the image size, enhanced color saturation and increased the contrast, and finally made an unremarkable bowl of noodles mouth-watering. To add words along with the picture: "the sense of ritual in life." Clicked, posted.

I didn't have a good appetite during the whole meal. I used the energy that should have been supplied to my taste buds to check my phone and other people's comments on me:

Wow, it looks delicious.

Good workmanship.

People who love life can have a sense of ritual, even when eating a bowl of noodles!

I smiled at the last one. I was not a life lover; I was just afraid of life. So I tried hard to make it seem more than so bleak. And the sense of ritual was nothing more than a memorial ceremony for something about to pass away. This exposed one most ridiculous thing about life:

we don't care much about what we have, but bid farewell to what we have lost, as if we valued it a lot.

Hence, in the thirty minutes of eating that tried hard to make my life seem meaningful, I lost the meaning of my life.

At two o'clock in the afternoon, I went outside.

The cold air held my breath for two seconds. Then I tightened my coat and headed into the direction against the harsh wind.

The supermarket was not far from my home. I walked there with slow paces, listening to a piece of light music played within my earphones. I like songs without lyrics so that I can improvise my own melody. There are seldom opportunities in one's life to follow his or her wills, so I always cherish each possible moment of behaving freely.

Ten minutes later, I walked into the supermarket. Warm gas blew around urged me to take off my coat. The temperature difference between inside and outside covered the glass with a thick layer of fog. For a few seconds, I felt like being isolated from the world outside. It was the last day of the old year. Toasting and laughing, people gathered here and there to celebrate the upcoming new year. So the supermarket was especially empty and quiet at that time. The aroma of roasted chicken came out, adding a little vigor to the whole public space.

I moved my cart from shelf to shelf without buying anything. A lot of times I buy stuff only when I see it. In addition to the necessities of life, I like to spend money on something superficial but actually useless, like a carving candle that can only burn one hour or a hand-size

teddy bear with a limited edition. So as to socialize with others. I wasted a lot of time and energy being around people who seemed brilliant and tried hard to prove myself a shrewd decision-maker. But I eventually couldn't be entirely accepted since I chose them for their brilliance rather than who they were. So they treated me the same way. They were just in need of a person as a comparison to highlight their brilliance.

No one needed me to prove my shrewdness to them. The consequences of bravado were all on my own. I was wasting my life but didn't please myself at all. No wonder I felt that time passed so quickly, that meaningful days were as short as the daytime of winter. I didn't even understand what I wanted, so how could I understand the meaning of life?

I bought roast chicken, though I couldn't eat it all by myself. I decided to please myself for once.

In winter, Boston was already getting dark at four pm, and the daylight dimmed little by little walking outside the supermarket. In that period, when the sun is about to disappear, I'm always inexplicably sad.

The kind of sadness is very melodramatic and also very fragile. It is like the sense of loss with a stuffy nose, but no tears. Most of the time, I think about whether I regret losing a day or blame myself for not fully utilizing it. Although a person can experience thousands of times from day to night, a past moment can never be duplicated, and decisions made cannot be changed. Even if I went to the supermarket at the same time tomorrow, the wind speed, the depth of the snow, the whispering of passers-by, and the traffic would not be identical to today.

I was going to lose the moment that I was living in forever, and I felt sad about it.

There were few people on the way back. I huddled in my thick down jacket, following the last beam of light above the horizon as I trod through the snow. It was the last day of 2018, and I wanted to be back to my living place before it completely ended, to have a good reunion with myself and say goodbye to the old me in a place away from snow and wind.

"Hey, happy New Year."

The words flew into my ears like a snowflake. I didn't even have time to tell who was talking to me or not. Suddenly I turned back. Blurred by the snow, there was a walking figure in the opposite direction of me, dressed in a red hat and a long black down jacket. Pacing slowly, but very concentrated, the figure did not turn back.

I couldn't see the face, but I did hear the New Year's greeting clearly. It was like a bouquet of flowers for a tribute in the funeral of the deceased in 2018, and I held it as I leaned toward the fading sun.

"Happy New Year." I don't know who I was saying it to.

Maybe to everyone.

At four o'clock at night, I was back home.

By definition of time, four o'clock is still early. But according to the law of nature that day is followed by night, I still call it at night when all lights from day have disappeared.

The night seemed long since it started at four. During the winter break of my sophomore year in Boston, I was going to spend the extended night alone because my home is so far away, and I chose to stay for a local internship. On the other side of the Pacific Ocean, my family might

be catching the last shift at sunset, and my friends might be boarding their bus home. There was the smell of food, the noise of the streets, the crowds of people, and the daytime that was equally long as the night.

But I had nobody around. The only friend who was not home either just left for Miami to stay away from the cold weather. I could understand, night in Boston does not like jollification. In addition to the empty corridor, there was a lamp replaced for the sun, a cracked water pipe, a noisy clock, and a delicious roast chicken that stayed with me for the new year.

I started having nothing to do again. Most of the time, I enjoy being alone when I can focus on what I like to do without being disturbed. But I couldn't find anything I wanted to do at this moment. The darkness seemed unreal to me. I needed someone to bother me, to disturb the supposed vigorous day time that being muted by night.

So I turned on a random episode of a TV show, which had noisy voiceovers and five or six characters talking. I didn't even need to see the color screen, figure out the lines of each character — all I need is the lively virtuality performing in the cold and quiet stage of reality. I need to hear someone talking, need at least one voice to break the silence, need another force to divide the night with me. I didn't speak but respond.

Five hours before midnight, I turned off the video because I heard other voices.

Across the building, a family was having a party. Shadows of tall and low figures were launched on the curtains by the lamplight. And I saw them embracing, raising their glasses, laughing, cursing, and cheering. Slowly, the night began to materialize, no longer a misty mass.

It turns out that only sound is not enough; I needed something genuinely exists, showing up in concrete form. Only by confirming the existence can I assure that I am not an orphan abandoned by day, and I have relatives who are adopted together with me by night.

Although I'm not one of them, I was still delighted that at least I knew they were there, at least I was no longer a single person fighting. With the companionship of another existence, I got the chance to take a rest from the war that resisted the cruelty of a long night. I began to enjoy the boredom in a more relaxing mood. Staring at the ticking clock on the wall, I wondered if I would be able to sleep at night.

The desk lamp was bright, as bright as if hanging in the sky, it can become a moon. I owned the moon, which is equivalent to owning part of the day at night. I was so reluctant to separate from the day when I thought I could do a lot of things.

But I did nothing at all. Then the day was over, and the year was over.

The night after twelve o'clock turned into the beginning of another new day.

At six o'clock in the morning, the first light rose above the horizon.

The painting on the ceiling was destroyed, and the distributed light spots gradually formed a warm, bright mass.

For the past three hours, I had laid in bed and counted my days. I lay in a posture like a newborn but felt like having gone through my not long, yet not short, eighteen years.

The bed lamp was on, making night and day collide. So did my eighteen years of chaos collide with the clarity of the beginning of my nineteenth year. The first day of 2019 was as usual

as the past eighteen years. The sun was still rising from the east, the snow was still falling outside, the water pipe was still crying, and the clock on the wall was still noisy. I was still me, and in spite of all those wasted days, I was still me.

But fortunately, I was still me, not swallowed up by the darkness of nothingness.

If I did accomplish something in the past year, it must be that I didn't waste my last night in 2018 for reflecting on my wasted days, until I saw the start of 2019.

An actual farewell needs not a ceremony, but only need to go across the time.

On a morning like any other, something was left yesterday. I survived in the last long night of the past year, and more of them were waiting ahead. I still couldn't change the circulation pattern of my routine life, but I started to regulate the route it circulates. The kind of exploration is not a pursuit of superficiality, like making a fancy breakfast or buy a cupcake that looks delicate but can't fill my stomach like a roast chicken. Instead, it is to read more books, participate in more social activities, and do more things that make me truly happy. By doing so, I will not force myself to become a perfect square by shaping all my angles sharp, but to be a circle with thousands of possibilities, the one that could roll powerfully through countless days and nights. Till the end of the world, it might be the sun or the moon, better to brighten someone else's day and night.

In the morning, the water pipe is dripping, but it tears for happiness.

