

Mountains Crimsoned with Flowers



THESE 16 poems are selected from a collection by Li Ying published in Chinese under the title *Mountains Crimsoned with Flowers*.

Li Ying was brought up in the Army after liberation. Through the portrayal of mountain scenery and the various aspects of life of the frontier guards, the poet sings the praises of the P.L.A. men's love of their Motherland and people.

Mountains Crimsoned with Flowers

Li Ying

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Drawings by Chen Yu-hsien

See the red flowers filling hill and dale,

They are the fighters' lives and youth.

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My First Day in the Mountains

*H*ere's the mountain, one true to the name.
Towering and majestic, piercing the ninth heaven,
Your peaks, in serried ranks,
Stand close to us like brothers.

I pat your flank in greeting:
What good chance brings me here!
Let me give each peak name and number,
To make us of the same rank and file.

I passed my childhood poling a boat,
You are my first mountain.
But don't say our friendship is new,
For right here our fathers pitched their camp.

But for your fascinating steepness,
How could I steel my muscles and my courage?
But for your inspiring strength and bold challenge,
How could we take you as our mate?

O good earth! What dignity could you boast
If your peaks were level and your streams slow?
With a longing heart I plunge into your depth,
Feeling your embrace warm and close.

Cloud and mist beshroud your summits;
Your slopes a myriad scenes unfold;
Here ancient forests roar and whistle
As clouds scud and roll in yonder dale.

O Mountain, tell me, tell me,
How many peaks and ravines you boast?
How many monstrous rocks o'ergrown with creeper?
How many are the precipices where eagles soar?

With throbbing heart and surging blood,
I grip unfailing bayonet and grenades,
And declare, Chairman Mao, rest assured,
For this generation it's our turn to stand guard!



The Mountain Sentry Post

*W*hen did the unruly sea
Suddenly quieten down
And freeze into these precipitous peaks,
Vast, sublime, imposing?

Behold, amid sky-piercing heights,
Where iron-gray shows between blue-black and brown,
Lofty stands our sentry post
Atop a perpendicular cliff.

Do you call it a sentry post?
It's like a perilous rock, or a thorny grove;
Like a cluster of clouds,
Or an eagle perched in rest.

To sight it from far below the peak,
You need binoculars for aid.

Then you see wild flowers beam before the door
And sweet berries blush outside the window.

For our good neighbours, we have, you know,
The sun, bright moon and gentle breezes;
Our family embraces flowers, trees and birds,
All without a name.

Though frequent storms the thunder,
Our four walls are guarded by pine roots and ancient
vines;
Though infinite stillness prevails,
The song of each peak and stream we know.

Our five pair of watchful eyes,
Scan sky and vale day and night;
Our five throbbing hearts
Make the mountains alive.

Ours is a stirring life;
In our hearts the supreme command we cherish.
Be proud, great Motherland,
At all times we are your loyal fighters.

High we stand on the mountain,
Yet around us seems the sea:
When wind and cloud thunder like billows,
Are not the mountains rolling against the skies?

This small sentry post on the mountain
Is like a sail out at sea;
When you look into the night sky, O brothers,
And see a far-off star,
It is our lantern on the mast!

Recollections of the Sea

Yesterday I was guarding the coastline,
And today my post is in the mountains.
Surging and swelling,
The sea still rolls before me.

Because I love the ocean,
The undulating mountains
Surging, rippling, to meet the sky,
Are the swell of the sea to me,
And our outpost a sail on the crest of the wave.

Because I love the ocean,
The fleecy clouds over the mountains,
Scudding and curling,
Are foaming breakers to me.
Can the soaring eagles be petrels
Skipping over the billowing sea?

I love the ocean
And the mountains no less.
To guard them is the task of a P.L.A. fighter.
It's because they are part of you, our Motherland,
That I defend every inch with devotion.

Today I am at my post in the mountains;
But the ebb and flow of the ocean
Still pulsate with my blood.
If tomorrow the Party commands me
To guard the sea again,
These serrate mountains
Will stand forever in my heart.



The Eagle

Over a thousand peaks
That tower like clustering cloud
Or angry billows,
An eagle unfurls his wings.

He surveys the four seas below;
He claws at the boundless sky.
His bold brilliance can only compare
With sun and moon and stars.

With the breathing of mother earth throbs his heart;
With the gliding of swift rivers flows his blood.
His life and vigour can only be sung
In the song of nature.

He hears the growing of the seeds;
He descries the cloud and mist ascending.

On, on he flies, and on,
Our frontier under his watchful eye.

O staunch, heroic eagle!
Inspiring lofty pride:
The image of my comrades
Who now stand guard in the mountains.



Spring Comes Early to the Mountain

The thaw sets in;
Each mountain brook glistens,
Half ice afloat,
Half water green.

In each ravine, each terraced field
Commune members busy,
Digging ditches, spreading muck,
Turning up the soil.

Red soil and green slopes,
Fighters' eyes wide-sweeping
Range after range;
The throb of life is endless.

Weather-browned arms bear water pails,
Ear-rings glitter in the sun;

Titlarks warble,
Hastening the bloom of mountain flowers.

Spring in the Motherland,
Where does it begin?
Peasants' spade and spike aswinging,
Fighters' bayonets all asparkle.



Night Patrol

*P*atrolling at night, dark clouds gather,
Thunder crashes,
Torrential rain
Fells trees and levels hills.

Patrolmen, blinded, grope for washed-out path,
When lightning on the cliff reveals
Seven characters, big and bold,
Shining in the rain.

“Carry the revolution through to the end!”
To the patrolmen, drenched from head to toe,
Each character blazes like white fire
A spur to soldiers in the struggle.

Silent lips this call recite,
Press on with revolution;
Let wind blow and rain descend,
My heart is red, firm is my will.

Long, long is revolution's road,
No pause, no halt along the way;
Press on, let ancient creepers be our paths,
Climb up, defy the storm, and guard the frontier.

Returning at dawn, the rain has ceased;
Bluer the water, the hills greener.
Stand at attention to report to Peking,
Bayonets shining under the rosy clouds of morning.

Our Cook

Lighter of foot than mountain stags,
An earlier riser than the mountain eagle,
Softly he opens the door and, looking up,
Sees peaks shrouded in swirling mist.

Taking matches from his pocket,
Softly he strikes a light;
The lamp shows his nimble shadow
Lighting the stove,
Cooking rice and fragrant dishes.

Mountains enfold our little sentry post,
Smoke from our kitchen floats above the mountains;
Busy indoors and out, our cook
Heeds neither clouds nor mist. . . .

His vegetable plot outside the window
Has turned the boulders green,

And in the sty behind our post
His pigs are fattening;
His face is always wreathed in smiles,
All day we hear him sing.

Two fine accompaniments he has:
Indoors, his guitar; outside
Cascading springs. . . .
Buoyed up by revolutionary songs,
Toting heavy loads
He flies as if on wings.

The night patrol will soon be back,
He speeds to fetch them water,
In his brimming buckets glinting a new dawn —
Red sun and emerald mountains.



Rain

*A*ll over the mountain
The scent of wild grass,
Slopes of fresh vivid green
And the gurgle of brooks. . . .

All day the skies have seeped
Light, steady rain,
Pattering down on my sentry post,
Pattering down on the rocks.

In fancy I see golden beaches,
See plantain leaves wreathed in mist,
And hear horses galloping
Over the northern steppe.

For far and wide
Are villages I have stayed in,
Paths I have trodden,

Comrades-in-arms and dear ones.
Are they thinking of me now?
Does this silver, insistent rain
Bring word from them?

Well I know their deep concern,
For each raindrop carries word,
Softly, insistent
Drumming into my ears
The words: Be vigilant!

The Frontier at Night

So still the frontier at night,
Peaks loom higher, the moon seems smaller;
The moon sleeps on the mountain's shoulder,
And the mountain sleeps on the shoulder of a sentry.

By the village the camp-fire turns to ashes,
The last embers in the cottage hearth die down;
In the misty valley
Nightingales are singing.

But by the precipice bayonets gleam
Where the patrolmen part the grass with their guns;
Seven hundred million people look to them
To guard against marauders.

Seeds smile in the earth,
Children chuckle in their sleep,
And in our great land a new day dawns in peace
As dew drips like pearls from the grass.

Thank You, Chuang Folk

From seven *li* off we fetch eucalyptus wood,
And nine *li* away we fell the cinnamon tree.
Come, fix the beams before the wind blows strong
And set the uprights before it rains.

We cut rush grass on southern slopes
And bamboo on the northern;
Tie rush bundles for roofing thatch,
Weave bamboo splits for walls.

Space two windows facing south
To welcome sunshine and warm breeze;
Place door to north towards Peking,
To point our steps the Chairman's way.

Thank you, poor and lower-middle peasants for your
help,
Thank you for your faith in us in the P.L.A.
May Army and people unite more closely,
And you, Chuang folk, ever prosper!

Our Calendar

Count not by the calendar
How long a P.L.A. man has lived in the mountains;
Count by his sweat,
The callouses on his hands,
The birds he can name by their cry,
And the clouds whose shapes he knows.

Fruit trees blossom by our side,
Rice ripens under our eyes,
Spring and autumn come and go at our feet,
And sun and moon change shifts on our shoulders.

That little window in our outpost
Is our calendar hanging high.
That stone path trodden smooth
Records our length of stay.

Scores of years we need
To build our Motherland.

And to guard her mountains and rivers
We must train our bodies and make them strong.

Count not the years we've lived in the mountains,
Or how long we are to stay.
We'll not relax, dismount our steeds,
Before we reach our goal.

For our lives match our Motherland's;
Every day we live through
Is recorded
In her advance.



Sentry Post Brook

*L*ike a naughty child playing in the hills,
The brook flows past our sentry post,
Gleaming, sparkling
And whispering in my ear.

Tell me where you have your birth:
In clouds atop the mountain?
Or in a spring beneath ravine?
And whither do you flow:
To river, lake or the vast sea?

Thank you for calling from afar.
You sing and dance so gaily;
In spring you bring us willow catkins,
In autumn you send the song of the frog.

Dawn mist washes my face,
You fetch me a white cloud towel;

At eventide we come from the rifle-range,
Your greeting is like the lilt of a guitar.

You remind me of the boundless waters over which
we fought,
And of the beauty of our Motherland;
Streams large and small enrich our country's soil,
Bringing all dignity and happiness.

Down the years I've crossed a thousand rivers,
Meandering wide or narrowing to a thread;
Every murmur is like a mother's call,
The voice of our dear land.

At this moment my comrades are at their posts;
They know how to fight for her cause,
Because even a streamlet among the pebbles
Is a tiny artery of our great Motherland.

The Forest Militia

*L*ike eagles flying over foothills,
Our militia guard the forests.

Rifle on shoulder, rein in hand,
Eyes vigilant below fur caps.

Their horse's hoofs strike the frost — clip clop,
As they count every fir, red pine and poplar.

Two, three centuries these trees have grown,
Yet to them the towering giants seem young.

Shrouded by cloud, hung over with mist,
Wild birds sing for them.

In this quiet cradle, I believe,
Each tree is dreaming sweetly.

Here they come, our militiamen, with light steps,
Fearing to rouse the trees on the mountain.

They even wish to open their great-coats,
To hold every hill in tight embrace.

Far, far off, vigilant, they ride, sweeping storms from
a thousand hills
And leaving a carpet of red, red flowers.

From deep valleys comes the whinny of horses,
Echoing and re-echoing among the trees.

Under the militia-rifle screen
A thousand plants grow green and fresh.



Ancient Cliff Path

*L*ike a serpent winding its way
Across the hillside;
Only the eagle circling in the sunset
Can point to the ancient cliff path.

Through the centuries this mountain trail
Has withstood storm, ice and snow;
Now vines and trees shroud it deep,
Cloud and mist curtain it high.

In days past couriers hurried along its length,
Now buried deep in wild growth;
But the ancient path remains, skirting vertical cliffs —
A work of wonder, the people's pride.

Today, fighters come to the mountain
To drill blast holes among the clouds.
Overnight, as if a gale sweeps down the sky,
The ancient cliff path is awakened.

Over our footprints milestones rise in a row
Train whistles billow the pine tops;
Tunnelling, bridging;
A railway pierces obstructing hills.

Echoes carry my message
To forebears and posterity —
Chairman Mao's soldiers are truly proud
To bring the socialist dawn in train loads.

Going Deep into the Mountains

— *To the Mother in the Hills*

One drizzling morn,
As we push on into the mountains,
This gully, this brook, this thick forest
Remind me of the mother in the hills.

In past, humiliating days,
Didn't you see how after a day's work
She drew her hungry, shivering child to the fireside
To patch his ragged jacket?
Her dishevelled hair stuck with straw,
Like trees in the fury of the wind.

A gale swept the black night,
Clouds pressed hills, hills locked clouds;
At this moment you'd hear her solemn call,

Like an obstinate hand shaking the hilltop,
Urging her boy to rise against the enemy.

Our hills were poor,
But the mother there poorer by far.
What did she possess?
Only shrunken hands and a bony frame;
Not even a floating cloud belonged to her.

But our stubborn mother in her cave dwelling,
Generous in her poverty, strict in her gentleness,
Dressed our wounds with her last grain of salt,
Made porridge with her last grain of rice, to warm us.
For herself she boiled herb root.

After smoothing her hair, with coarse hands
Spoonful by spoonful she fed the fighters,
Nourished the revolution,
Nursed our Motherland with its mountains and rivers,
And, in the years of famine and desolation,
Sustained the life of the whole nation.

If you don't understand this mother,
You know not the hardship of revolution.

Each heart cries: Forget not, forget not,
As we push on into the mountains —
Into these tumbled hills
Throbbing with the mother's heart.

Farewell to the Mountain

Leaving the mountain as our troops move on,
Our hearts swell with feeling no words can describe.

Clouds hang on treetops,
Mist shrouds peak,
What do they hide from me
If not the tears in the people's eyes?

Recalling my first days like yesterday,
I'm leaving as I would my mother;
Great mountain, you've nurtured me three whole years;
Country folk, our feelings go deep,
Live or die, together we defend the frontier.

Days and nights never forgotten,
Spring in the hills, autumn over the river,
Hearts ever warm.

Three years we tread the same path,
Three years we shoulder the same task.

Under the red pines, together we criticize all that is
wrong,
In storm we train to defend the mountain.

Separated by ravines we live,
Shoulder to shoulder we stand close.
Peasants level fields, we build dikes,
Sentry duty they're ready to take.

Something happens, just give a shout,
North and south can hear the beating of our hearts.
Peasant hearts are all red,
As blackberries are all sweet.

The fragrance of gum will never leave me,
Every dike and dam is pictured in my mind,
Every neighbour's child I remember,
All singing birds I can tell.

When I first stood sentinel, the peaks seemed to narrow
my view,
Now, the wide world before me shimmers.

The peasants give me wisdom and courage,
Harden my being like steel;
The flag overhead grows ever red,
The path underfoot ever wider.

Taking my soldier's kit I depart;
What shall I leave to ease my mind?

I'll leave the bridge I built to the brook,
The road I paved to the sky,
The trees I planted to the birds,
The stream I cut to the rice fields.

Today how many are the streams I'll cross again?
Tonight on which mountain will I camp?

Far, far away may I go,
Cloud and mist may divide us,
But always I'll be a tree on the big mountain,
My roots with yours twining to keep us close.

The fighters turn at each step, looking back,
But their hearts remain in the people's dreams.



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