A Poem by Po Yang,
while in jail.

IN NEIGHBORING CELL THERE MOANS A GIRL

I remember that when you first came here
   The sun’s oblique rays were in the corner of my cell.
Suddenly hearing the warble of Chinese mango-bird
   I was all at once overcome by agitation.
The next day your voice could be heard saying:
   Go out and buy some Canton oranges that I might taste.

After that then all lapsed again to quietude
   Broken only by the sound of steel locks.
The first sound was that of your summons,
   The next of your short steps passing down the hall.
Again came the sound of your return
   And of your sobbing, which set my breast to quaking.

You seem to be suffering from tuberculosis;
   Your hacking scatters cross night and day.
Daytime coughs can be endured
   But at night bring mournful desolation.
In the gloom of the dark cell and silence of soul,
   My heart shatters with your every cough.

Actually I don’t know you
   And from now on I’ll not see you again.
All I’ve seen of you is your back
   When you were binding up your clothes.
The same disease deserves our mutual sympathy,
   Just the two of us, specks in this sea of humanity.

Literary pursuits explain my presence—
   What brings you here?
Maybe you are yet unbetrothed
   And your tears are for thoughts of father and mother.
Or maybe you’ve already given your hand
   And your children are now bawling beside your bed.

Today you have the blackest of hair,
   In the days to come I’m afraid it’ll all turn grey.
I want to send you my wishes for your happiness
   But this high wall cleaves the few feet between.
You should take better care of yourself,
   One’s peace and health must come before all else.

I hope that when you leave the prison
   You will regain your former appearance.