

Though I only met you once,
It was an eternal twenty minutes!
Who would have thought that such a sylph-like beauty
Would leave this world as swiftly as the morning dew?

No! Life is but a material illusion.
That beautiful soul, forever blessed by God,
Lived a mere thirty years like some rare and short-lived flower.
With tear-filled eyes, I see you smiling as you return to your fairy abode.

Do you still remember, Mansfield, the promise we made in London?
At Lake Geneva, where the snows of Mount Blanc are mirrored in the water,
We were to meet this summer.
Now I gaze sadly into the clouds, and let my tears fall.

When first I knew life
I sensed in a dream the grandeur of love.
Life's awakening is the maturing of love,
And now death shows me both life and love hang by a thread.

Sympathy is an unbreakable crystal.
Love is the only way to live a life.
Death is a great and mysterious furnace,
Tempering the divinity of creation.

Would that my grieving thoughts could fly like lightning
To touch your soul in heaven?
Shedding tears I ask the wind,
When can the gate between life and death be broken?

REFERENCES

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Prof. John Minford, of the University of Auckland, in preparing this translation.

1 The poem was written by Xu Zhimo himself.

2 Xu Zhimo must have made an error in remembering the actual date of his meeting with Katherine Mansfield, for she left Murry for the Hotel Chateau Belle Vue, Sierre, with L. M., on 29 June, because of a rift between them. She did not return to London until 16 August, when she was accompanied by Murry and L. M. to Dorothy Brett's house, No. 6 Pond Street, Hampstead. They both stayed there till the end of August. Then, Murry went to live in Vivian Locke-Ellis's house at Selsfield in September while Katherine remained at Pond Street, meeting Orage, Koteliensky and attending lectures by P. D. Ouspensky. On 2 October she left for Paris, with L. M., and two weeks later she went to Fontainebleau. Hence Xu Zhimo must have seen her sometime during the last two weeks in August 1922. Likewise, the address he gave is also a mistake of remembrance. It should be 6 Pond Street instead of 10 Pond Street.

3 The author made a mistake here, for the Queen's College which Katherine Mansfield attended in 1903 when she was fourteen was not connected with London University. It was situated in Harley Street and was the first institution to be created in England for the higher education of women.