Chinese Poems of Christopher Kelen

in a straw house by a blue stream

justice and righteousness –
their hide-out this valley

like pine and like laurel
everywhere but still reclusive

some folk are solemn –
the farmer wearied by the plough
the woodsman by axe likewise

water winds clear in the streams
wind lingers in bamboo

blue the bank
and blue the mountain

sunset – a cold cricket cries
the thicket fragrant
all this in a single cup
call it the dusk snifter

it’s only through idleness
you’ll come to see
trumpets of war

trumpets of war
attend to this city
soon I will be soil

and reader
it’s true
for you too

so soon
we’re gone
why grieve for kings?

hours mar the mountain heights

the shadows of arrows
fall over the farms
winter river

nowhere on the winter river
lacks the bright moon

monkeys high in the wind
wail for it

drift of leaves
trees crowding cliffs

and down deep
where the river rolls

sorrows sleep with us
midnight sounds

the rapids wreck boats
once this moon sets
since the rebellion

birds in nests keep their heads down
the deers’ ears are all burning

tactics are the talk of the land
but a battle takes up so little room
it’s easy to
walk away from the dust
and the clatter, the rot

take a leisurely bend in the river
footsore you’ll rest where the breeze catches up
look high and join with the mountain in laughter

here comes an old poet alone
the empty town in open arms
hardly a pot to cover the fire

only children to meet him
each on a hobby horse
mounted well
and greedy for the wars to come

they hunger for their time

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