



The beauty of spring blocks my way

I didn't sleep much that night. The next morning after sitting and chanting, I proposed that we go to the kitchen and build a fire. It was cold and she agreed. We had a cup of tea together and I tried my best to tell her that I loved her. I said many things, but I could not say that. I spoke about other things, hoping she would understand. She listened intently, with compassion, and then she whispered, "I don't understand a word you've said."

But the next day she told me she understood. It was difficult for me, but more difficult for her. My love was like a storm, and she was being caught and carried away by the energy of the storm. She had tried to resist, but couldn't, and finally accepted We had the deepest desire to be a monk and a nun – to carry forward what we had been cherishing for a long time – yet were caught by love.

That night I wrote a poem:

Spring comes slowly and quietly
to allow winter to withdraw
slowly and quietly. . . .

Very tenderly, the wound opens itself in the
depths of my heart.
Its color is the color of blood,
its nature the nature of separation.
The beauty of spring blocks my way.
How could I find another path up the mountain?

I suffer so. My soul is frozen.
My heart vibrates like the fragile string of a lute
left out in a stormy night.
Yes, it is there,
Spring has really come,
but the mourning is heard clearly, unmistakably
in the wonderful sounds of the birds.
The morning mist is already born.
The breeze of spring in its song
expresses both my love and my despair.
The cosmos is so indifferent. Why?
To the harbor, I came alone,
and now I leave alone. . . .

Spring has come
to every corner of the ten directions.
Its song, alas, is only the song
of departure.



I wrote this poem for relief. How could we continue as a monk and a nun and still preserve this precious love?

Monks do not usually share stories like this As a monk, you are not supposed to fall in love, but sometimes love is stronger than your determination.

Thich Nhat Hanh, *Cultivating the mind of love*, 1996.

Saying good-bye

On New Year's morning, after sitting and chanting together, we heard the people from the village come into the temple. . . . On the second day of the New Year, I left for my temple. I had little hope of seeing her again.

I came home a different person, but my brothers in the Dharma did not notice. My daily life must have looked normal, even though I was talking less and spending more time alone. At times, I just called her name in a soft voice to keep from missing her too much. . . .

Then one day, when I came home, she was there. . . . I gave her a book on Buddhism in French to translate. . . . Every time I gave her a lesson, we stayed together longer than was necessary. In two or three weeks my brothers in the Dharma saw this and realized I was in love (it would have been difficult not to notice), and to my great surprise, they accepted it without criticism. The feeling of gratitude for their acceptance is still in my heart.

. . . . But when her Dharma sister found out, she could not accept it. One day I saw a tear in her eye, and I understood. I knew I had to solve the problem.

The next day, after our lesson I said, "Dear younger sister, I think you should go to Hanoi" It was a difficult decision because she would be at the other end of the country, but I felt I had no choice.

She bowed her head and said one word, "Yes." She had complete faith and trust in me. How could I not feel responsible?

I was overwhelmed by sadness. In me, there was an element of attachment, but there was also the voice of wisdom recognizing that this was the only way.

I remember the moment we parted. We sat across from each other. She, too, seemed to be overwhelmed by despair. She stood up, came close to me, took my head in her arms, and drew me close to her in a very natural way. I allowed myself to be embraced. It was the first and the last time we had any physical contact. Then we bowed and separated.

Thich Nhat Hanh, *Cultivating the mind of love*, 1996.