

Chinaman

Rainbow
is the color of the streets
that we speed through,
my hands clutching the metal rack
behind my grandfather's bicycle seat
that I hold onto for dear life.
Slate gray
is the color of the toned paper of the magician,
who whips out a portrait with a flick of a wrist.
*Don't worry you'll be able to draw the world in a
single breath,*
Grandfather tells me.
And through the streets
we fly
like birds,
to escape my grandmother's
sharp assaults for late a morning's ritual
to the flea market.

My grandfather's laugh reminds me of the sun,
reverberating across the room,
filling even the darkest corners with
rays of golden hope.
His eyes crinkle at the edges,
not "crow eyes,"
as I used to tease him, Instead,
the footprints of a dragon-- a gift of wisdom.
His skin is still folded with time,
his hands are still firm with age.
I think
the dragon gifted him some of its energy too.

Back then
were smiles of golden mango sweetness,
tastes of pork-fillings,
sounds of scratched charcoal onto the pores of paper.

The eldest of seven,
illegitimate son of the Cultural Revolution,
stole the only key out of this desolation
forced math equations into his mind
ignoring his shelf full of story books and sketchpads.

Now
in the lobby of his humble apartment,
golden dragons crawl through the intricate red weaving of his oriental carpet,
crayon-scribbles decorate the white walls that Picasso would marvel at.
Potted bamboo in porcelain pots line the window
providing company for a family of jade Buddhas.

the bamboo

he said
*should be in mountains,
reaching towards the blue, blue sky
instead of growing towards
a plaster ceiling.*