

GOLDEN FLOWER OF PROSPERITY

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The following individuals read and discussed the thesis submitted by student Katelyn Elizabeth Holland, and they evaluated her presentation and response to questions during the final oral examination. They found that the student passed the final oral examination.

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ABSTRACT

Golden Flower of Prosperity is a mixed genre work, incorporating letters, found material, lyric poetry, narrative poetry, and prose to explore the experience of two Chinese immigrants in Eastern Oregon at the turn of the twentieth century. By combining found documents with imagined narratives and creating folktales from a few facts, the poems provide an embellished interpretation of history, building the characters of Ing Hay and Lung On into archetypal legends, while still endeavoring to make them seem like real people.

The Objectivist poets Charles Reznikoff and Louis Zukofsky inspired some of the formal aspects of the project. Reznikoff's found material poems in *Testimony*, and his New York poems motivated the letters and narratives wherein my characters speak for themselves without any sentimentality or authorial interpretation of emotion. In the herb poems, Zukofsky's *80 Flowers* is an obvious influence; I adapted the form from eight lines to five, but kept Zukofsky's five-word lines, playing with hyphenated and compound words to tease out nuances of meaning.

The role of the folktale in my thesis is something that has not been fully realized yet. By playing with the archetypal figures of healer and trickster/gambler found in Chinese folklore, I intend for Ing Hay and Lung On to become almost legendary. Their story is ideally suited to the structure of a folktale, and by weaving the magical elements of folktale into more concrete poems, like the letters and testimonials, the thesis takes on a somewhat surreal quality – the line between fact and folktale becomes blurred. A prose

folktale serves as the introduction to my thesis, and poems like “Embarkation” and “Road” include fairy tale elements.

The second section of the thesis, titled “John Day River Valley,” is a collection of poems about the landscapes and people of Eastern Oregon. These poems represent the change in my writing after coming to the MFA program at Boise State. Like the poems in the first section, they are inspired by an Objectivist poet; Lorine Niedecker’s poetry about place helped me decide the sort of poet I wanted to be. Writing about Eastern Oregon has helped me find my voice as a poet, and these poems in the final section of my thesis represent the emergence of that voice.

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GOLDEN FLOWER OF PROSPERITY:
POEMS OF CHINESE IMMIGRANTS IN EASTERN OREGON
1860 – 2011

“Just search for a country where such things are still unknown,
and your fortune will be made.”

-Grimm's Fairy Tales, “The Three Sons of Fortune”

“I am remembered by my friends, that is enough for any man.”

-Ing “Doc” Hay

A Folktale

Once two brothers were born in China. Being born many villages apart and to separate families, they did not know for many years that they were brothers. Some might say they were not brothers, being of unrelated blood, but brothers can share a spirit, too. The elder was born to a farmer, the only son of his generation, with the responsibility to grow up and care for his entire family. The younger brother had a much easier life, and studied the writings of great Chinese ancestors.

One day, when the elder brother was old enough, his grandfather taught him the secrets of healing – which herbs could treat various conditions, and how the body was made susceptible to the influences of the elements and thereby became ill. But the grandfather's knowledge was not complete, and the elder brother did not have the money to buy tuition at a school where medicine was taught. Thus, the elder brother remained a farmer, married a suitable bride, and fathered a son and a daughter.

The younger brother grew up to be very clever, and found he had a knack for gambling. At any opportunity he would take up a game of chance, and his luck was unbelievable. All his neighbors exclaimed at what a lucky young man he was. This brother had a thirst for adventure, but where can a young man find adventure in a village in China? He stayed in his parents' house and continued his studies, though he yearned for excitement. The younger brother's parents eventually chose a bride for their son, hoping the duties of supporting a family would settle him and encourage him to take up some occupation. Though his wife gave him a daughter, the younger brother was still restless.

Now in those days, far across the ocean, in the new country called America, men had discovered gold, in astonishing quantities. The stories came to China, even to the tiny villages of Guangdong, where these brothers lived. Gold, simply lying in the rivers, for anyone to pluck up! Fortunes of gold, and every man who sought the yellow metal lived like an emperor. China was a country of very poor people and much famine, and many men decided to sail to America, to try their hand at prospecting.

The elder brother had five uncles, all of whom desired the money to be had in the Land of the Golden Mountain. One by one, the uncles sailed from Hong Kong to Seattle, and each uncle sent letters from a place called Walla Walla, promising to send a fortune very soon, for surely they would dig up the storied gold. These claims so inspired the elder brother that he decided he would seek the promised prosperity across the sea. With his father, the elder brother joined his uncles.

When the younger brother heard of the American gold rush, he did not even stop to consider. He packed his belongings and booked passage to San Francisco. Because the Americans had already mined so much gold from California, the younger brother had to travel north and inland to find places where he could get gold for himself. As he traveled, he learned to speak like the white miners, and he began to dress like them. Finally he came to Canyon City where the mines were rich and the demand for labor

high. Though there were many of his countrymen in Tigertown, the Chinese settlement just north of Canyon City, the younger brother felt like an outsider – they were from far distant villages and spoke very differently from the younger brother. For the first time in his life, the younger brother began to question his sense of adventure.

Now, after only a year in Walla Walla, the elder brother's father was missing his home terribly. Let the old return home and rest; let the young seek their fortune abroad – this is what the elder brother told his father, and so the father returned to China. Without his father, the elder brother felt no obligation to remain with his uncles, who were not making very much money anyway, working in mines owned by white men. He had heard of a town in Oregon where all men, even the Chinese immigrants, still found gold by the bushel. Though he spoke very little English and still dressed like a Chinese, the elder brother was confident in the skills he had learned with his uncles. He would find work and send vast fortunes to his family in China.

The younger brother arrived in Tigertown shortly before the elder brother, and found that his particular talents for business cunning and gambling would serve him well. If he could only find a partner to start a business, for there was a building available, and the Chinese desperately needed their own general store, to avoid the white businessmen who cheated them out of every penny. Fortune, as always, smiled on the younger brother.

When the elder brother arrived in Tigertown, he had not been seeking work long at all when the younger brother approached him. The younger brother was delighted to learn that the elder brother knew the secrets of traditional medicine from China, and suggested they combine their skills and resources to start a store, an apothecary, and a community center where Chinese could meet, seek work, smoke opium, and worship. Luckily, many of the men in Tigertown were distant relatives of the elder brother, and most had come from the same part of China. They were happy to loan the brothers money to begin their business.

At last the brothers recognized one another, and swore from that moment to remain faithful partners in business and brotherhood for all time. Their store was the Golden Flower of Prosperity, and drew both Chinese and whites from all over the land. Neither brother ever returned to the land of his birth. The Americans imposed many restrictions on travel by Chinese immigrants, and any Chinese who traveled back to China was rarely allowed to return to America. For those who preferred their lives in the Land of the Golden Mountain, it was safer to remain and cut ties with family in China. In time the elder brother became a great healer, renowned throughout the West, sought by whites and Chinese both, and he learned more secrets from a skilled doctor in Tigertown. The younger brother was the most successful businessman in both Canyon City and Tigertown, and gambled successfully for the rest of his days. But these are other stories and will be told another time.

Black Pill

Statement given by Dale Parsons, assistant to Dr. Ford, 1865

About a month after I came
to Grant County, that was the first time
I ever heard of what Chinamen call
the black pill – a bean-sized lump of raw opium –
and what they do with that pill,
that they put anyone who's maimed
out of the way, they give him the means
to end his life with honor, all because they won't
keep feeding a cripple who can't
earn his keep. I went up
on Dixie for a cave-in, one white
fellow dead, and two Chinamen,
with a third mighty injured, his leg crushed.
Shen Jen, not yet twenty, and not much
to be done for him –
a dram of laudanum, a bandage,
a word of sympathy. His four friends,
full Chinamen all, *kiyied* and hollered,
like Shen Jen already died,
but I said he'd heal,
though he mightn't ever walk.
The mine owner, Maloney, told them
what I said with his broken Chinese.
The white boys went to clear the shaft;
the Chinamen dug graves. I left
as they set the dead white man
to his eternal rest. Down the hill
I stopped by Dan's, to stable my team
behind his smithy, and I found Doc Ford
taking a whisky with Dan. I hadn't but said
hello and how do when Doc
called me a damned fool, ordered me
back up on Dixie, and didn't I know
not to leave an injured Chinaman alone
with his own folk? Got me a fresh team,
hurried back, but when I came round,
not a Chinaman in sight, only four graves
on the hill, looking toward the valley.

Embarkation, 1883

Hsia Pin Li's clever son,
poppy in the left hand,
right palm bears the tiger's bone;
dreams nightly of gold.

Jin huachang lies east
across an ocean,
beyond the fertile valleys,
desert's wily temptation.

One string of cash sewed
into peasant's clothes, food
for a few days, he kisses
his wife and children farewell.

His knapsack holds secrets
older than the emperors;
his talismans, the spice,
the herb, the new fawn's eye.

Notation: Tiger's Bone

Acrid sweet *hǔ gǔ* vintage-yin-tonic
atrophy dissipate wind-cold-damp felidae paralysis
ward bone-for-bone *Os Tigris* sinew-strength
yellow-white remedial banded black-poison beast
substitute *Leopardis Canis* excessive-hot caution

Crossing

Visions, sweetest apparitions,
I ache. Slim pipe
slips from lax lips, some pale hand
bears it away. Rolling
with ocean's turbulence I do not feel
called by home any longer.
East and more east I journey
where the sun dwells, his chambers
hung in gold. Lulled, my body
becomes the ship, the sun
my shining guide, my land
the golden mountain.

Leaving Seattle

From Townsend's filth we arrive
at noon and resupply in Chinatown,
preparations for our morning departure.

Tent city by the water, we find
cots for this night, a dozen
other Ings, family a thousand years past.

Fogged-in nighttime gunshots
crack through dark Seattle streets,
smell of the Sound, the camps of waiting clans.

Barbarian voices shouting furious,
torches casting shadows;
Father leads me further from the city.

Brothers we shipped with crying,
lamenting, begging, *we cannot leave*,
disembodied voices full of terror.

Feet bare on packed dirt wood
shoes wrapped, bundled with all we own
flee – no riots rumored east.

Road

Green to gold, damp to dry,
new-built road through grassy hills;
crossing another depthless blue,
clouds might drown if they came here.

Long rows of unmarked graves
line the roadside. His brothers are there,
his five uncles and his fathers, too.
He may join them yet.

Swinging through junipered ravines,
the road collects the little towns
where every man has the same dream,
bearing them eastward to more.

Tigertown, beside a silty creek,
tent-city of ghosts. Hollowed eyes,
pale, grimy faces, these are not the men
who wrote the letters he read in Guangdong.

Notation: Cicada Molting

Five-eyes cataract-relief summer autumn lamellae-song
 Salty-sweet exuviae *chán tuì* ocher-translucent
 Cold eternal-youth *Cryptotympana* convulsion calming
 Night-terror laryngitis scissor-grinder *atrata* wind-heat
 Resurrection liver-lungs cicadidae happiness

Letter, Mr. Becker of Becker & Zimmerman's, Merchants, Canyon City, Oregon to an undetermined business acquaintance, 1887

Dear Sir –

There has arrived recently from up north, a Chinese youth, unusually handsome, of marked confidence, despite his crippling unfamiliarity with English. He is apparently alone, his father having returned to Kwangtung, his native province, and he leaves five uncles in Walla Walla. His credentials are uncertain, I understand he has experience with deep-vein mining, some other sorts of labor – he mentioned road-building – and he claims to have some knowledge of Oriental medicine, which he intends to practice. He inquires after accommodations. I like his looks and he cannot be less skilled than our present physician. I sent Mr. Ing on to Tigertown as I suspect he has relatives there. I have given him a letter of introduction addressed to you, as I believe your building, the old stockade on the river, is ideally suited to Mr. Ing's purposes. I must warn you, he has met Lung On, sometimes called Leon, that inveterate gambler who expressed an interest in your building Tuesday last.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant, etc.

Before

Grandfather's workbench, worn
smooth after four generations.

Dark, sweet-scented shed,
five hundred secrets on the shelves:

tiny phials glitter the lamplight,
red boxes bear blessed herbs.

Mortar and pestle, scales,
knives and abacus – secondary implements.

Softest touch is surest guide,
eyes and voice give way to finer tools.

Each body explains itself,
pulses communicate ailments.

Young master of many skills,
Grandfather whispers in your ears.

Letter, Doc Hay to his cousin Yu-po [in the United States?] 1895, fragments

Esteemed Brother Yu-po:

May your business progress
and your ambitions be achieved
for an early home-return.
These are our wishes for you.

Remember the gold ring you took?
That was Huang Liang-wen's.
Not to harm friendships
among us all; please tell me
where you mortgaged the ring
so I can redeem it
and return it to him.

You might be interested,
we are going to remodel the temple
and change the Buddha's clothes.
Donations come from all directions.
Send me immediately the money
you will donate.

It is very hard to keep the store open.
New Year approaches – we have no merchandise.
Lung On, while procuring goods, lost all the money
gambling with Americans
in Portland and Baker.
Don't let others know, lest they laugh
or not believe it.
If you have some money
lend us forty or fifty dollars for commodities.
I will repay this loan
when you return to China.

Letter, Mother in China to Son in John Day 1898, fragments

Chin-hsin, Take Notice:

Do not worry, we are all well at home.
 I cannot sleep and eat well
 worried about you, always thinking of you.
 You have been away many years;
 your second elder brother died,
 then your father died,
 then your eldest brother died.
 Though fate is the cause, I grieve deeply.
 Old and weak as I am, I may die at any moment.

I hope you come home,
 I hope you marry while I am alive
 so I might die and close my eyes
 without grievance.
 Take care of Ah Fung.
 It would relieve your father and brothers
 under the ground
 if you help your cousin get a wife and home.

Save some money, come home
 at least next year.
 You will never see me anymore,
 I may already be gone when you come back.
 Would you feel sorry then?

I received the twenty dollars.
 I guess you are all right.
 I am relieved a little.
 So long as you are not home
 I am suspense.

Notation: Chrysanthemum Flower

West-wind feverfew many-hued-abundance eyewash cool
Bugbane autumnal feast-for-the-eyes *grandiflorum* drunkard-remedy
Ninth-moon-joviality *jú huā* life-of-ease sweating-evil-qi
Dendratherma heaven-full-of-stars sweet tranquil dragon's-beard
Bitter dizzy-insomnia liver blossoms hearing-seeing-restoration

Headache Flowers

Ellie Williams, recounting a cure obtained from Doc Hay, 1901

Mama has her megrims,
dizzy and her head all sore,
and seeing little spots
when she changes her compress.

When Mama has her megrims
she takes a powder in some whiskey,
which she gets from Dr. Parsons
every time we go to town.

But today, Mama has no powder,
and she just lies on the bed
with her laces loose
and her hair without pins.

So Mama says, "Now Ellie,
get to town and ask the doctor
to send me some of the powder
I take to cure my megrims."

It's two miles into town,
and I'm too short to saddle Bess,
our old mule, who bites anyway,
so I walk to Dr. Parsons' house.

Dr. Parsons has a housekeeper,
and she's real nice, and I ask
for Mama's powder, but the doctor
is tending to a lying-in up Granite way.

Mrs. Olson, that's the housekeeper,
tells me there's another doctor,
but he's down in Tigertown.
She says Doc Hay makes magic potions.

Now, I'm no little girl;
I've been to school every year,
and I know there ain't no magic.
A doctor is a doctor, anyway.

I find Kam Wah Chung,
just like Mrs. Olson said,

all stone on the bottom,
green and red and wood on top.

A Chinaman in a bowler hat
is on the porch, smoking.
He smiles at me, offers me a candy;
he talks just like white folks.

“Hi there, young lady,”
he says, his name is Lung On
though most people call him Leon,
he tells me as I eat my candy.

I ask about the China doctor,
for my Mama, who has the megrims.
“Sure thing, miss,” he says,
and he leads me inside.

I’ve never seen a Chinaman’s
house before, and this one
is a store, too; Mrs. Olson
told me so, and she was right.

Leon takes me to the right,
where a short little man
sits in a dark wooden cage
with tools and flowers and boxes.

It’s the first time I ever heard
Chinese and I laugh a little
when the small man says something
to Leon and points at me.

Leon must know why I laughed;
he smiles and asks about my Mama.
Yes, her head hurts, yes, she’s dizzy;
no vomit, but she does see spots.

Doc Hay nods his head,
he must understand English fine.
He turns to the wall of boxes,
pulls several free, opens them.

In a coffee grinder go twigs,
white root-like things,
and tiny white chrysanthemums;

then all in a bowl with clear oil.

Around and around, he mixes,
the scent rises, sweet and green,
stone on stone, until he has plain
white powder in a paper envelope.

Flowers and roots don't seem
like real medicine to me,
but it's only twenty-five cents
and Leon says it lasts a while.

Just a pinch in strong tea or coffee,
and Mama's megrims will go away.
If it doesn't work, says Leon,
then Mama should come see Doc Hay.

When I get home, Mama's abed,
asleep, though she looks pale.
I boil water for tea, add the powder,
and wake her up to try it.

First, Mama says she wants whiskey,
but I tell her the doctor said tea
instead, and just to drink this now,
which she does and grumbles.

In just a few minutes, Mama's up,
her color's back, and she's pinning her hair
away from her face, and swearing
it's a magic medicine.

When I tell her, then, where I went
and what it is she took, she laughs,
and says, "Bless that China Doctor
and his magic headache flowers."

Letter, Lung On's Daughter Ju-hsin to Ing Hay, 1901

Wishing you health and well-being,
my mother's strength endures.
I am blessed in all things,
 your greatness as well.

For many years I say to myself
I have never seen my father.
He must have made a big fortune by now,
 you might convince him to return home.

My mother weeps every night,
she is thinner than a twig.
My grandparents are in the ground;
 we are quite alone.

Perhaps you, my distinguished uncle,
might suggest to my father,
that he send some money to us;
 we hear much of your great success.

Your dutiful and affectionate niece,

Ju-hsin

Notation: Cinnamon Bark

Pulverize seven-year-interior rheumy hot-energy mother-pain
Sweet-spleen obsession bright *Cinnamomum* autumn-warmer
Grasp-kidney-qi *roù guì* cold-feet leads-fire-to-blood
Purple-red oily waning-gate-of-vitality *cassia* brittle-aromatic
Acrid engorging spice-tang curled-quill wheezing-ease

Blood Poisoning

In Lung On's newest buggy, we drive
 eleven miles east, up the mountain,
 to Smith's ranch, through acres of cattle before
 we arrive at Smith's house near sunset.
 His son, blood poisoned by a barbed-wire fence,
 lies dying inside, the white doctor's medicine inadequate.
 Smith comes to greet us, his pulses
 imbalanced, I do not need to touch him
 to know this, but he is not my patient.
 He extends a hand – I bow.
 Lung On explains, taking his hand –
*The jong-ye cannot touch you, my friend,
 his fingers are medical instruments,
 too much use deadens their sensitivity.*

Smith's son is Richard, his room warm
 with musky disease, hazy kerosene
 light flickers, his pale face wet with fever,
 youth creased into old man's pain.
 His breathing, damp and fetid,
 rattles in the difficult air.
 I draw off my gloves, finger by finger, touch
 both deep and superficial pulses of his healthy arm.
 Sepsis, yes, but other ills also,
 his kidneys unable to grasp the qi,
 lungs deficient with phlegm-heat.

I speak to Lung On, who repeats my words
 to Smith in his barbarian tongue,
*The jong-ye says initial treatment requires
 six days and nights, full recovery
 is another six months, and the cost for all
 medicines and treatments: one thousand dollars.*
 Lung On does not hesitate to name my price,
 and Smith will not barter with his son's life.

My cure begins with common sense.
 Natural light, fresh air, strong fire, clean water,
 Smith's servant opens windows, stacks wood,
 fetches and carries all I have not brought with me.
 Richard's wound, ragged, shoulder-to-elbow
 gash, deep, red and yellow, sticky,
 the white doctor's bandage clings and smells;

I must treat this first.

As in Grandfather's book, I prepare the salve.
 Ground wū shāo shé, black-stripe snake,
 with bái huā shé, his white-pattern brother,
 to calm convulsions of flesh and nerve.
 Sweet ròu guì – *cinnamon?* asks Smith –
 warms the kidneys when they cannot grasp the qi.
 Water binds the salve, a white
 owl's feather sets it deep into the wound.
He will repeat this process for six days, Lung On translates.
 Poison will collect under the skin's surface,
 green and creamy boils I will lance,
 drain, and bandage; we will let the tonic work.

Barbed-wire venom lingers in Richard's body,
 his veins and organs weak with fighting, fever
 in both blood and lungs. From my bag
 I extract red boxes with Grandfather's
 neatly painted characters, slim blue phials
 dark with oils, and I measure out my cure
 by touch into a shallow dish.

First is qīng hāo, bitter wormwood,
 to cool fevers in heated blood.
 Gān jiāng, shēng jiāng, too,
 dried roots and tender leaves –
now ginger, damn man thinks it's Christmas, Smith says,
 I do not know about his Christmas,
 only that ginger burns off phlegm.
 Wǔ wèi zǐ, five-flavored seed, is sour and warm,
 a purple oil to relieve wheezing lungs,
 Finally zé xiè, marsh drain root,
 draws off lung damp, kidney fire,
 and drains away blood infections.

Mixing and stirring, grinding a fine powder,
 I motion to Lung On, translate my words,
 I say, "Infuse only a pinch in boiled water,
 your son must drink one cup daily, for six months,
 his blood will purify, his kidneys
 will grasp the qi and balance."

We remain six days, I sleep in Richard's room,
 six long nights, a new owl's feather
 each time I apply the salve. Every dawn

I lance the boils, pour bitter tea down
the boy's throat. The seventh day, Richard
revives, weak but lucid, Smith weeps, thanks his god.
I settle myself in Lung On's buggy,
"The tea, for six months, do not forget," I say,
and he repeats the instructions to Smith.
Relieved, Smith insists on taking my hand,
wraps his enormous rough and scarred fingers
around my glove, bows his head to his knuckles.
I owe you my son's life – I am in your debt.
On my lap, my black bag is one thousand dollars heavier.

Notation: Multibanded Krait

Sweet dragon-kin lustrous-infant-viper salty body-without-head
 Empty-grave-inhabitant parasite toxin sedative pale-yellow-meat
 Summer-harvest *bái huā shé* white-pattered-cunning
 Liver-and-spleen leprous yin-deficient *Agistrodon* wind-damp
 Warm sycophancy-changeling *acutus* blood-poison-expulsion

Delivery from China

Barbarian approval stamped
 over ideograms, each character
 a hand-lettered direction,
 in English, John Day,
 Kam Wah Chung and Company

cut away strings, strip away paper
 a wooden chest, cured and sealed
 against moist and breach and ill fortune
 each wax seal cracked in two, the lid
 lifted off, a thousand fragrances

escape oilcloth lining,
 contents enticing,
 selectively chosen
 home in a box

small red cartons
 marked clear and delicate
 glass phials gleam
 colored oils,
 paper-wrapped joss sticks,
 sweet,
 full of prayers,
 luck and fortune,
 three pomegranates
 ripe before packing
 tobacco cans
 packed with cicadas
 monkey's paw and tiger's bone
 sticky waxy cubes of opium

among my herbs the letters, the family
 remonstrance, the pleas for money,
 to *remember the starving and cold*
 in a place I cannot call home

Letter, Pei-chin, a cousin in China, to Ing Hay in John Day, Oregon, 1903, fragments

Most Esteemed Cousin Yu-nien:

Closely related as hand to foot,
yet we are separated by a distance
even the swan and fish
could not carry a message across.

You left a dozen autumns ago.
Things must go well for you.
I heard you possess the mighty power
of turning heaven and upsetting earth
with medical technique;
you are looked up to
as the greatest among all physicians.
You must have made a great fortune.
Profit always goes with fame.
Your family will be enriched
though they are thoroughly wretched now.
Why not send money?
They endure starving and shivering.

My brother and I are idle at home,
as if our hands were bound.
I aspire to seek my fortune abroad.
I cannot afford the passage,
nor can I find a source
from which to borrow.
Pray, extend a hand to elevate me.

I have sent several letters,
but received not a single word.
It seems you are too apathetic.
Please answer me soon.

Notation: Common Cocklebur

Diluvial deep-green-ear-seed bitter styptic *strumarium*
lung-channel heat hooked-prickle fruit decoction
sweet broad-and-narrow-zone nomad acrid chilly
pruritic *Xanthium* yellow diuretic shoots-and-leaves
lanceleaves pasture-lethal *cāng ěr zǐ*

Letter, Liang Kwan-jan in Hsin-ji Li, Hsin-hui District, Guangdong to Lung On, John Day, Oregon, 1905, fragments

Dear Elder Cousin:

We parted many years ago.
I hope business has been prosperous.

I have been unemployed
since I have left America.
What I can do now is sit and waste food.
This is disastrous enough
to use up a mountain of gold.
I plan to return to the United States.
Perhaps there is a chance for me.

Two years ago your mother died.
Last year your daughter married.
Your aged father is immobile.
He will die any day now.
Your wife is lonely and hurt –
even the neighbors feel her misfortune.

If you cannot come home
at least send money for living expenses.

Notation: Clove Bud

Green-to-red prime Zanzibarian warmer
barbarian's tongue spike fragrance rebellious
genital *Eugenia* qi downward hiccup
dīng xiāng winter-herb-aroma puncture bloat
spleen-entrance oily desire *carophyllata* pungent

Evening in Winter

Door sealed against nighttime snow,
 four men in the kitchen passage
 shuffle mah jong tiles, build walls,
 bone clicks against bamboo, scrapes
 hollow over rough pine.
 Markee Tom down from Dayville
 eyes the restless opium beds,
 he never trusted dragon chasers,
 that includes Charlie, laundryman,
 to his right, comfortable, back to the door,
 loves only gambling more than the pipe.
 Lung On next around, back to the stove,
 eyes on Tom's quick fingers. Up
 by five thousand, though unwise
 to rest easy, he lips his Havana, the store's
 newest import. Sam, they call him
 Buckaroo when he's riding
 with his white gang, lines up his bones,
 the smallest stack of cash tonight,
 he needs to win a hand or resign.
 Beginning play, Charlie, the eldest,
 the East Wind – cast the dice, pluck
 up the luck, draw a hand, cash in honors.
 Draw and discard moves around the table,
 voices muted, but they carry
 and the barbarian eater cries out.
 Slight and silent, Ing Hay comes
 from the herb cage to attend his needs.
 Sweating, gasping, eyes flicking
 over Taylor Made constellations,
 his lips strain for the dream stick.
 Tiles click, Hay mutters, sweet smoke
 permeates the close air, blackens
 rafters. Dragon-chaser sinks to slumber,
 the game progresses, a few tiles remain
 on the last wall, a seeming draw,
 Hay pauses to watch the progress,
 a welcome break from prescription mixing.
 Tom discards *Po* the white dragon,
 Lung On cries his victory *Mah Jong!*
 Sam tosses in his cash and nods to Hay,
 a pipe to drown his sorrows. Charlie
 taps his frustration through his tiles.

Nursing Home, 1952

After a lifetime studying bodies,
I know when my own is about to die.
I can fix anything
but my own broken hip.

My nephew insists on white medicine –
men in white buildings
wearing white coats –
they never listen to the body.

Portland is not the town it once was,
noise and people and always increasing.
My nurse has yellow hair, green eyes –
she is always smiling.

Every week I lay under the machines
that see into one's bones.
I do not walk anymore;
the nurse wheels me down the halls.

An excess of wind-cold-damp
on the chilled metal table,
machine humming and clicking
I shiver, left alone for hours.

Unsurprising, this heaviness in my chest,
fever, chills, coughing phlegm.
I know I will soon die, my nephew,
my diligent pupil, always by my side.

He talks of what must be done
the business, the money;
he has plans, papers, I sign things,
and then he speaks of China.

Why would I want my bones sent
to China when my family is here?
My brother lies on the Golden Mountain,
and I must rest in the same ground.

Baker City's Chinese Cemetery

Wandering spirits let undesirable things
happen, tempted by demons, loitering, aimless,
in this lonesome place, beyond city life
and consciousness, sun scrutinizes shallow graves.
South Wind stutters up the hillside,
quivers jade-fleshed greasewood, fills
resting places with sagebrush bones.
Previous tenants exhumed,
laundrymen, cooks, and gardeners,
purified and packed back to Guangdong.
Spirits won't abandon ambition, fortunes,
won't meet their fathers' spirits without winning the Land
of the Great Gold Mountain. Spirits cannot
escape, no memory of incense lingers
in the rough and hand-cut joss house. No offerings,
wine or fruit, the Three Precious Things
to guide restless spirits to their ancestors.
Their constant companions demons, navigating
a million tiny pinpricks in brown paper curls,
tucked in corners with fifty years' dust.

JOHN DAY RIVER VALLEY
AND OTHER POEMS OF EASTERN OREGON

John Day River Valley

We may have seemed insubstantial then,
with our needfulness and bliss.
An orchard by a flat-rocked river,
cherries, peaches, small-mouth bass, and thunder;
basalt cliffs, my love, for flying from.

Old rural dragon,
keeper of knotty-limbed brides -
the hidden and the timeless transient.
This last unfettered waterway
speaks its stories in the voices of the drowned.

*A woman died in that house before the Great War,
not young or alone or old with family.
Do not look at her empty husk.*
We just follow the red lines to the town over the hill,
white amidst the yellow and ever moving together.

And how many of the hapless trudged away defeated?
Those dents are signs of cunning and luck.
Shaped like the river we drift,
we lay so low the sky is a ribbon
where the stars still come out for us.

Below Clarno Rapids

I.

I must be humored.
I am old.
Dying.

Bedridden is not a restful sleep.
I fear lingering in half-darkness,
not feeling my limbs,
not knowing my own name.

II.

A high bridge, low rails, no traffic.
Broad and low, the river skims
flat brown rocks except for one deep pool
beside the green cliff,

except this year,
angry and fast, the river runs
opaque with silt –
it might flood yet.

Difficult to devise excuses to walk
in a downpour, but they accept
my wistful reasons.

I am stiff and the pain is sharp.
I can remember when climbing
over the railing took no thought.

The bridge is high,
the river fast,
and the fall, better than remembered.

III.

Yesterday in Monument
an old woman jumped into the river;
we must watch for her body.
If we find her? Wrap her

in black trash sacks? Tuck her
 under the spider net? Seventy-two
 river miles is a long way to float with a corpse.

May's sixth straight day of rain
 has clouded the water to chocolate
 where it whorls around
 house-sized basalt.
 Will we see that old woman
 Through this murk?
 She could be to Cottonwood
 with her two-day head start.

IV.

Family mythologies grow around landscapes become familiar.

V.

The east bank, a cliff with a shallow cave
 at its foot. From the ceiling grows
 a mock-orange, its blossomed constellation
 a marker of passage.

Rocks of Imminent Doom
 around which no male in my family
 can row. It seems that canny old lady
 maneuvered herself quite nicely by.
 When the weather clears
 on schedule around Hoot-Owl Rock,
 I'll resent my wet sweatshirts
 for the next thirty miles.

The favored landing at the feet
 of the Palisades is haunted in no one's lore
 but our own. Each year
 the wind-chimes grow more distinct.
 Nervous chukars toss rocks
 into the curling eddy from five-hundred feet
 up the cliff, laughing to ward off ghosts.

VI.

Four power-line supports mark
the last five miles before Cottonwood.
These windiest five miles on the river
are where the farmers
have unimagined the land with cows.

The dead old woman hasn't stopped here
either, and I'd like to think
she made it to the Columbia.

The girl in the Condon coffee shop
tells us no body has been found yet.

Drifting With the River's Flow

Fleet-footed shadow dog,
fetch us the blue sky back again.

Drifting swift we pass
thousand-foot fortress walls

tearing shreds of grey mist
from the clouds.

The undersides of basalt
crenellations are guarded

by armies of swallows.
Dog-rose constellations

mark our progress. Lift your nose
to the air, shadow dog –

by the green-earth scent
of juniper, bitter mock-orange,

and May-rain wind shall you
guide us past the sunken boulders.

Grant County Clan

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion...over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. Genesis 1:27-28, King James Bible

Embracing extremes fundamental
to her own destruction
the matriarch wastes into skeletal
dependency on her children.
Unquestioning obedience dissolves
into dissatisfied neglect.
Her mate retreated ages ago
into reserve and tragedy, accepting
his misfortune. Vicariously,
he encourages his progeny
in the only course left to them.

Blue, black, red, and white,
Seven guns and a Nova
to each of three sons and a daughter.
The bequest began with their father
when the century turned
and the apocalypse didn't come.
The surest way to survive the end
of the world is an arsenal
and a car one can repair oneself.
With an extra twenty-first chromosome
the fourth son may never
use his Nova, being only
marginally functional. The guns
still carve out his niche
in a post-apocalyptic world.

From the fortress
crouched atop the remotest hill,
they'll defend their decaying mother
from everything but her own self.

Lost While Looking for Susanville Above Four Corners and Magone Lake

The cabin and outbuildings emerge
from Ponderosa shadows
and a frozen spring navigates
new trenches among dredge tailings.
You stop the car and say *we're here*.

The graying dusty insides are
unsafe for us to enter,
especially in winter when
the piled up snow leans
warped boards like weary old men.

Doug Fir, Blue Spruce, and Lodge-Pole moan
and sway casting snow into our hair.
A mulberry's feet cradle
three decaying wooden markers,
sheltered from the snowdrifts.

We've finally found ourselves on a ten-year-old
map of the mountain's shoulder.
Twelve more miles to Susanville, you tell me.
An unruly aspen break shivers leafless
farewells in the weak afternoon light.

Park Meadows

First frost

rain three days

one clear night

piners have grown spikes

long, clear

branch-snappers

Through the morning

I watched the sun

split and return to itself

green leaves preserved

gleaming till noon

Ukiah

Lone coyote in the green remnant,
hurry off; the storm's coming in.
Cows, my only neighbors, hunker down in the long grass.
The sky has come so close to my head –
sheets of rain beyond the mountain.
You're still standing there, coyote.
Is your scavenge a good one?
Hills full of fire, fields full of rain,
I think you might, after all, be a stump, coyote.

Wide brown plain at five-thousand feet,
cows have not been where you are, coyote.
Eternal dust catches winds to the smoke plumes.
Follow, coyote, seek the near hills, green and tan.
In the middle-distance, their treed backs fade into smoke haze,
two branchy skeletons silhouetted at the crown.
Horizon lost to smoke and rain,
emerging gold in cloud breaks.
We hear the drops before they reach us, coyote,
even lightning touching the barn doesn't scare you.

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