

Kismet

When you speak to me of kismet, I want to deny you.
I want to shatter these irrevocable words which occupy
the pregnant pauses that mark space between us.
Yuan fen, you say, drawing out the Chinese syllables
with a voice of conviction, sentiment so compelling
that I could have almost half-believed in destiny.
I want this too – the convenient excuse of heaven-planned
unions, of soul mates who flout the laws of unfortunate geography
and wandering nomads who find, in the aftermath,
the certainty of refuge.

But when you speak of kismet, I think of thread
that binds skin to skin, a red string of fate that
winds itself relentlessly around my neck,
entangling cumbersome bodies in a hasty closure.
I envision my wrists sore
from the ties that bind. I am already aching
from the burden of charted histories, tracing
the muted walls in my parents' bedroom
which bear witness to an unapologetic time stripping away
what they once mistook for timelessness.

When you let that pronouncement so smoothly roll off your tongue,
I can only offer you an irreverent silence. Elsewhere,
lovers are building homes in one another. Disregarding
their sobering inheritance; Hoping to craft dwellings
which they could call their own.

Calendar Days

Braille

I do not know the language of yearning. But I think it lies somewhere
within the space when pillow talk seamlessly flows into dreams.
Let me trace constellations in the freckles
on your back; and I will try not to stir
as you attempt to uncover the narratives buried
beneath this skin.

Clothed in nothing but desire, only the familiar ache of burdened
skin on skin. I am doomed to only decipher you in foreign tongues
and snatches of conversation.
Outside, the world is dizzyingly plunging itself forward.
Our bodies greet each other like torn pages of silenced history,
speaking only in parenthesis.

Calendar Days

Night Tales

Growing up, I learned early that love did not come in carefully
measured doses. It barges in unannounced, fiercely interrupting

the nights where I willed myself to dull my ears.

Believing that I was safer behind my fortress of sheets, I often

traced my mother's voice to the living room outside,

where she haltingly declares that it would be impossible to forgive,

I don't think my sister ever uttered a word in response. I soon learnt,

deciphering whispers as I pressed my ear against her bedroom door

that there are desires that cannot be named. The days will seep into each other
and collapse into an uneasy silence. Her defiance.

Some nights, fighting sleep from her eyelids, a child in the neighbouring room
wraps herself in conditional promises of love,

and feared her own becoming.

Calendar Days

Feeding Ghosts

I.

The day after grandma passed away, they removed
the framed photograph of grandpa.
While I stared at the blank absence
interrupting the slightly yellowed walls, they declared
this will not be the way we remember her.

II

She always left a seat for him at the dinner table,
and cooked feasts
on the right calendar days.
The food always went untouched so I often wondered
whether spirits had any sort of appetite.

III

Every time the neighbours burn offerings, I wait
for the swirling scent of joss paper
to drift into my room on the third floor.
I sometimes imagine my grandparents
roaming streets, and hungry.

IV

We remember the departed the same way we
hoard memories. Selectively. There was a day in May
when hymns were sung and a house was cleansed from
its historical baggage. A child too unweathered
and ignorant then to recognize the sting of betrayal.

V

The flaw of the living, perhaps
to thwart good intentions
with bad deliveries, necessarily crippled
by the lack of hindsight, never quite knowing
the difference.

VI

Years on, and I try to make up for the lack
by offering them clumsy stanzas
on freshly printed paper. It is all too easy
to believe that I have the authority to
let ghosts linger.

Left and Leaving

I'll admit it: I don't know how to write this goodbye.
It is presumptuous to imagine that I could
even graze the surface with an array of
polished phrases and forced metaphors.
The stanzas aren't so much about my haphazard
collapsing into you, just
your well-calculated disentangling
from us.

I'll offer you: neither testament nor pedestal.
Here is my refusal to romanticize
carelessness, the time bided,
and the bitter taste of grand betrayal.
I am still learning how to stop
this catch in my throat as I try to
wrap my tongue around these dreaded syllables
and voice these echoes of farewells.

Here is my goodbye gift of clumsy syntax but
I don't think I can quite write this loss.
Because there is nothing remotely poetic about
the plainness of absence, dodged long shots,
the ease of trading sorrows to build
something we wanted to be greater than ourselves,
the wounds we deny and later learn to
acknowledge as our triumph.