

## Zuihitsu

*After Jenny Xie*

Wake into toothache of alarm. The sun arrowing in all directions, a lunatic compass.  
The sky does not remember itself here.

My mother's old bedroom in Kwun Tong. Scent of sebum and dehydrated dream. Under the bed, cigarette packets stacked into a child's castle.

Outside, the city breathing. During the war, people were buried in mortar craters across their streets. Afterwards, too many bodies to recover. Cheaper to build over it. Apartments neat white like the mah-jong set in my aunt's closet.

From the window, I watch trawls of fish being pulled from the Sham Shui harbour. The oily surface swelling with red. As my grandmother stirs her herbal soup, she says, *I have loved & loved, but love is not where I am from.*

At the wet markets, light hardens into the bright sharp of a beak. Crabs suffocated in plastic bags. Piles of tongues flowering into tongues. Knowledge is a blade: parting and parting.

For brief moments, I am returned to something insatiable. I grow fevered by chewing on the thinning fishbone of the past. How do you traverse the unspeakable? How do you construct the light you want to see with?

Dawn breaking open like a knife slicing a mango. The mornings when my grandmother kneels on her prayer-mat. Faith too, can be a form of disbelief. She believes in nothing her hands will give her.

Shopping for oranges with my uncle, whom I last saw when I was eight years old. *Too ripe, too firm.* The dark pits of his eyes. *Why devour what would otherwise stay sweet?* The answers buried inside the soil of me. I close my eyes, focus on my touch, my feel.

*Think about it,* laughed the woman waiting in line ahead of me, *Chinatowns only exist outside of China.*

Here, now, in Australia. My mother by the kitchen sink, her tongue tracing ampersand after ampersand in the air before me. What shape is she trying to learn by *xīn* (heart)? What is *here, now* anyway? The repeating comma of her lips as she calls out to me: *My xīn. My xīn. My sin.*

The self lives at the edge of its own border. At the monastery, a Buddhist monk explains: *Do not mistake 'I am' for 'I am this.'*

My father and I sobbing in the car, the phone on mute. At the time of my grandmother's death, they said her fingers were twitching as though she were stroking a child's cheekbone.

Thinking back to my first taste of snow in China. On a mountaintop, I wrote in my notebook: *Joss paper burning / from above there is only living.*

Dentures drying by an open window. Tiger Balm hardened like duck fat on a cotton sleeve. In an unknown village forty years away, frangipanis grow quietly through floorboards. How little the body leaves behind.

After a nightmare, the sweet soil of urine rising from the bedsheets. Three lines from Li Bo ringing in the curve of my ear: *Zhuangzi dreamed of being a butterfly / Or perhaps the butterfly dreamed of being Zhuangzi / Which was real – the butterfly or the man?*

Grief is a language I fail to untangle, a mouth with its own idea of an ending.

A brush-blur of train rides: Guangzhou, Pudong, Guiyang. My grandmother and I do not speak. Outside, lights flutter like Buddhist beads on the night's thread. Silence too, can be an entrance.