

The Garden, Echoes I

by Vivian (Xiao Wen) Li

i.

smooth river leads to quiet
winter dust on my fingers
frozen, with stars in water,
lantern fish in the wind.
I've longed for herons in my sleep,
jade water in trembling eyes,
for mountains to retire on,
cranes crooning a monsoon song.
In the garden, across generations,
stones weigh us to the earth, as the living
hums with the remembered, still slumbering

ii.

Leaning on the white wall a few steps from Moon-Gate,
river flowing like thrumming glass,
an echo-chamber reaching into golden souls
and verdant depths deep beneath rocks
yīn tiān, yīn for melancholic, hopeful—
the borrowed view of the park, cornered by hum-drums of cars.

A crow perched on the drip-tiles
wavers and soars beneath helicopters,
its partners driving gnats and insects underneath waves
of garden homes. They told me at the entrance
to walk slowly, enjoy yīn and yáng, to harmonize
with the spirit still lingering here 36 years since its conception
fighting against the thrall of capitalism
the pond beats on in stolen land,
the Georgia Viaduct trembling as she
remembers who she could've been.

I glance down, witnessing Tàihú Rocks rising
from the knuckles of my interlaced fingers—
the canyons and rivers, the hills of the college,
the inclines I skipped up with my grandmother
to purchase bird-feeders and sweet mochi. The alpine winds above,
my feet itching to run into the verdant field
sparkling with coins. Is it too early to retire
to the mountains like Zhūgě Liàng and wait for scholars
to knock on my thatched cottage when my return is imminent?

iii.

past the look-out point:
red fences, fields,
Boys of the Old Testament playing soccer.
Cars flying by hum
with the whispers of bamboo.
Fuchsia, plums, bamboo, chrysanthemums—
as magnolias bloom, pink,
each a curled sweet center unfurling,
toes as curled as gumdrops.

White orchid lips open over the water,
heads adorned with Nature's warmth,
leaning to catch their eyes in the reflection.
The tour guide said they were either
seeking validation,
or bowing to the garden in respect.

Stepping over Moon-Gate, we watch underneath
to relinquish the shadows we've pulled inside.

The pond pillows out her dress,
smoothes over the ripples in her body.
A mallard duck and his partner squabble
as they swim over, preening,
spirits reaching into the water,
into the Ting's reflection of heaven.

Witness light spilling as drops of Spring
sparkle onto my head.