

Migration Inheritance

My grandmother speaks in scale-
model realities: Her train
to Hong Kong didn't clank, no
diesel clung dizzying
in the close air,
nobody contested
the last seat. I don't know
how she prepared for severing
her past, alone. Her modesty-
cloaked words disown praise.

It's vital to starve
the phantoms who drum
regret, thirsting for the life
left—return, return home
to the courtyard square,
the desert breath sky, to tongues
laboriously won. Cold faces
in the winter light, hawthorn fruit
ambered in sugar glaze; joy

binds the heart
to a life unlived.
Raised high, the bone-white
baton in the conductor's hand
rises like a kite
and the choir's lungs fill, desperate
for release. I recognize
my grandmother in a stranger's words,
for I've knelt and seen the shadows
held in her mouth, the blind
cut scars she endured
to live anew. Gleam, let stones
gleam as we carry them
in our mouths to drown

memories' murmuring pull.
The haunted congregate
and preach betrayal of the self
who never left.
A signal flare shades the sun
behind a pillar of white smoke
drawn into our lungs—breathe,
it's only mist, the speech
of whales who plumb
the sea with odes

to bioluminescent stars

adrift in the deep past
we'd left before we evolved
stories to tell.

I must return to the ocean I fear

If the ocean lay unrolled
curdled with plastic I'd crawl
afraid beneath the blanket
downed with diatom silica
exoskeletons softening
crab shells mussel shells
fear the taste of acidified
amniotic seas fear temperature
baby's bottle hot against skin

coral ghosts pale under
blades of noon daylight
jellies rippling asphalt heat
trailing tentacled hunger

tidal changes rendered
satellite clear the devastation
of a millimeter the difference
of a degree

and another
and another.

Climbing to the 28th floor

We coaxed stories from my grandfather
of what he'd left behind. Upstairs,
the bees made a home of his
rooftop greenhouse. Drones shivered the air,
the hive an entwined knot of flight paths.

He told us of the cherry tree in Beijing
grafted to bear apples, peaches, plums. He left
when he was sent to be re-educated: ten years
away at a farm he never chose to tend.
Hands coarse from digging furrows. Wood handles
blistered by northern desert winds.

Once, he was summoned from labour — the orchestra
needed a clarinet capable of Gershwin's *Rhapsody*
in Blue. He returned to Beijing to play a stepwise
rise and fluttering *gliss* through the Central
Philharmonic heart. The orchestra followed,
nestled under honeycomb baffles.
He was sent back to the farm.

That was thirty years ago. Now,
between lessons, in his rooftop garden
high in the humid air of a southern city,
he plants and prunes to the tune
of ten thousand windowpane wings
in a glass house. He tells me he loves
his country. I've never seen him
take honey from the hive.
I've never heard him play.