

## **My Red Smoking Heart**

I hate to say this – but I live in a Chinese labor camp.

I hate to say it because I KNOW the Chinese  
imprison only flawed, evil persons  
(and only the most dreadful go to a camp).

After all, the Chinese *are* a fair and moderate people.  
I must deserve to be here.  
I must have committed AN EXTRAORDINARY crime.

*I wonder what it was.*

The sky is the same shade of gray  
as the guards.

The guards arrange their face  
muscles in the same impenetrable manner as this boulder  
I must shatter.

*And I imagine:*

If I struck these inscrutable faces with this filthy pick?

Oh, there would be only a bit of hard flesh dislodged  
a grating sound of rusted metal on stone  
maybe a *small* spark  
if I managed to hit an iron bone.

I don't dare, of course. I would be impregnated with bullets  
and then:  
give birth to a bloody heap of rags.

Now and then, I wonder?

*If That Wouldn't Be So Bad.*

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I was a good child  
growing up in a household of inexpensive vases.

My father was a carpenter and my mother  
a virgin.

Of course, she wasn't *really* our mother  
but we called her Mamá  
and on her birthday brought her bits of lace from the marketplace.

It wasn't until much later

*(after the war)*

that my virtue began to wobble on its axis  
my rectitude slipped from my chest into my pants  
and my wickedness grew a long branch.

I don't remember what happened, but I do know  
even an impartial judge would hand me this sentence  
with eagerness.

You see: I *am* a criminal child, an assailant of sacrosanct ideals  
a mass murderer of morals...

Well, that's what they tell me anyway, and after this long procession of years  
I don't know how to doubt.

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Today is different though! Today I am going to be free!  
A guard has leaned his rifle against a tree!  
He has only his dagger to stab his midday meal!

THIS IS MY CHANCE!  
to live without these restraints I clench in my red smoking heart  
like an army of shackles.  
Now I can return to the life I love!

*But he sees my shadow and turns quickly:*

With the force of his legs rising from a crouch  
and his arm moving upward like a victorious torch  
he PLUNGES his blade directly between my first and my second true ribs  
directly into the thumping mallet of my heart.

And when he withdraws the dagger, a thin ribbon  
of crimson smoke follows it, twisting and growing a little wider  
before it dissipates in the air.

And I hate to say this – but it isn't me.  
It isn't *my* life that leaps from my red chest.

It's a woman I dearly loved, a single face among millions;  
she entered me

*(without warning)*

and left jagged footprints on my stomach and thighs.

## **Goodbye Rudy for Ships**

I feel like San Pedro or Long Beach when I wake up: salt and oil in yellow streetlight burlap sky. Rats gnawing ropes over by Terminal Way in my head. Some mumbles from guys who walk by my bench under breath about bums, but fuckem: ocean breeze is still free.

From St. Mary's, ambulances come and go and they're not talking of Michelangelo no more with bar fights and numb junkies to heal. Taxi boys clap their gearshifts and sailors w/ cigarillos burp carnival beer but goddamn Rudy not coming back to pull my heavy wagon or pound nails in the tree house cause he took his goddamn head too far into the noose when he signed up for a hero.

On 10<sup>th</sup> St. I'm dripping sweat in my shoes and gave my last nut for some paper bag wine to go with sidewalk cracks and toes through thin leather soles when those knives of my long night took me over.

A retreaded soul knows how to pass right through parks and weave through all those precious pedestrians who got their brother back when the war finally busted. *They* didn't pull loose flaps from their pockets and plant them on footpaths like markers for a corpse of dead troops to follow home, but is cruel joke cause Rudy not coming back to spell me on the shovel, took his goddamn feet too far into the tripwires.

At chain link, dark gray hulls – and gulls drop some white streaks on the foredecks when I hurl empty glass at those stinking top brass with ribbons, but they're bunkered down in pentagons for sure and besides my arc over razor wire is weak, like speaking to giants from toadstools.

Right there on pavement in sodium light between fence and dock, my wine bottle shatters. Those last sad red drops drip from shards of myself like a stunted storm squall will slow crawl for reunion with an emerald sea.

## **The Plea of Poverty**

Exalted creatures, I beg you: leave  
the enslaved of the city to their stadiums.  
The air distraught with torches, distractions

animal satisfactions.  
Days ill with bloody hours, poisoned hearts  
of nations, creation crumbled, beached

and forgotten frightened souls, explosive speeches,  
annexation of relief from manufactured pain, a chorus  
of acclaim for primitive morals.

Leave them and walk across the desert  
in the skins of gods. I tell you with a thousand tongues  
they will crucify us

for a thousand years, yet in our tribulations  
we will flower  
the arid lands with tears and lay down

our cities on granite beds.  
By rotted root, we amputate worship  
of wealth, and the obsolete innocence of God.

Illusions on fire  
a northern spectacle of sky  
all the sick perjuries beneath the hoofs of horses.