

## **A Tattoo of a Coiled Dragon Seeking Enlightenment**

Panlong circles my waist, a dragon dance  
for mother and child, his chin pooled on one shoulder,  
eyes cast down, too timid to face the depths

of his own despair. His breath is soft on my cheek,  
smoldering exhalation of a newborn  
stayed to be fed; his green-scaled tail

clutched in tiny arms, too afraid to lose a semblance  
of his own self-worth. The artist on Haji Lane whirls  
his holographic pen over my pale skin,

a white-whiskered flourish across my navel,  
millions of microscopic reflector chips mined  
skin-deep to snare the mighty river dragon.

I've finished, he says, tapping the tip of my nose  
as if the blank canvas belonged to him; and suddenly  
Coiled Dragon stirs, a flash of fangs

as my spine is scaled like a waterspout, climbs  
through ebony strands before clutching my breasts  
with sharpened claws, his tail unfurled delicately

between my thighs, a second carapace perched  
on the bounds of land and sea, past and present,  
what is skin-deep and breached from within.

## Attempts to Assassinate Thought

*All trapped dreams must die.*

~ James Branch Cabell

In the memory labs of Io, a dreamweaver asks  
how I'd like to kill the thought of an ex-lover.  
Would I keep the gin on his breath, his piss-stained pants,  
each blue-belled crater the shape of a fist  
on the surface of my skin?

Do I excise the pillow talk, worn kisses on worn necks,  
keys crammed into dressers the day before lunch-dates  
with *just friends*, poor Mochi whisked off to the vet  
when he found us curled on the couch far too long,  
and his versions of five-year plans always littered  
with *forgive mes* and *one more chances*?

Will his eyes be my keepsake: twin caramel orbs burned  
into mine the day he asked *Do I know you?* in our hallway  
at Sheares, why I always kept my hair so short and shoulders  
and midriff too lemak for late-night suppers with boy friends  
at Fong Seng, and why don't I just *Come in lah*, his breath  
musked with spearmint and open-and-shut replies?

Or do I smother the thought of the thought of thought,  
my base want of his wanting; to never know I'll never  
know the answer as *No*.

## Rifts

It began as a flutter, a dip of the heart,  
bell-glassed cylinders shifting slight,  
hairline slits scrawled across walls  
— we sit seismic at the dinner table,  
washed silence and unbidden tremors  
cascading over worn mantles of “How  
was your day?” and “Have you eaten  
yet?” The great quake may have come  
and gone, but it feels as though we too  
have shifted, the silken granite sheets  
having ruptured into impassable ridges  
between turned backs, cold shoulders,  
and downcast eyes. We used to vibrate  
in each other’s arms, erupt at the earliest  
forecast of dishes in the sink, mounds  
of soiled shirts or loose strands of hair  
left in the shadow-zones. Now, only  
aftershocks run down your spine as we  
lie dormant at our center, blind thrusts  
in the dark like a pair of divergent  
plates too afraid to collide. Do I blame  
the sacred earth for rippling us apart,

or exposing rifts already there?

**Tesseract**

It's December and the day a ray of light  
absent like laundry spun too long in dry  
cycles, or a monsoon swirled with baijiu  
and acid brewed at the back of the throat.

Once, we spun on vertexed heels, our lips  
honeycomb and heavy, laughter folded  
across four dimensions as we donned  
Loki-schemes and Fezzes for infinite lives.

Now, we've diffracted through the coloured  
corneas of others' eyes: a Samsung washer  
with fixed states for black and white,  
Schrödinger's fridge always found  
without milk, and a mattress touched  
cold and Cartesian, the hypersurface  
of your back scattered by bamboo blinds,  
dulled projections, and the prismic distance  
of once-upon light.

Trigger warnings: sexual violence, imagery, trauma

### **The Second Rape<sup>1</sup>**

He told me to lie down, this time with a ‘please’,  
the stench of his sweat still clung to the strobed  
mattress he’d no doubt forced others onto before.

“Did I use authority to hit on you?” he asked,  
as a life-sized anime doll—with wide, frozen eyes  
and lips of an ‘o’—was lowered onto its equal.

“Was it like this?” he pressed, its arms pinned  
above my head and plastic thighs caged across  
my pelvis. “Or more like this?” he murmured,

as camera flashes embellished the black box  
of the judo hall. He might not have possessed  
the receding hairline or chicken-wire specs,

---

<sup>1</sup> After *Black Box: The Memoir That Sparked Japan's #MeToo Movement* by Shiori Ito, 2021



but still, he pressed: “What was my ‘type’?  
and “Were you a virgin when it happened?”  
as three men in vests circled and scribbled

on hardened clipboards and uniform nods.

When I finally found my voice, I asked “Why?”

*Why are you doing this? Why now? Why me?*

But he shrugged, in hushed reenactment.

“We have to ask,” he said, his quasi-concern  
like quashed blows to a body wanting

to fling itself off, and his, and his, and hiss:

“Why ask only now?”