Nuclear Peach

Roger Dunsmore
Nuclear Peach
for Meng Qingshi

You sit on the floor of my home,
shoes off, green tea cooling,
teach me the name of English walnuts:

    her tow—
    nuclear peach.

Beauty is a pregnant woman,
the big river
you swim every day (April to October)
though your body turns purple
those years in the countryside.

Together,
we translate a poem for your wife’s letter:

    My body is in the moon.
    One lamp reflects my thinny face.
    Thousands of things, including us, are quiet.
    The bright moon casts her dim light on me.

Your favorite artist,
a carpenter who learned to paint,
flowers, worms, fish, a frog,
always painted crabs
during the Japanese invasion,
for the way they walked, (30 million Chinese killed)
not like us, you say.

Professor Mao, you call him,
waved a chicken bone with meat on it.
Some of our soldiers, he said,
victorious on the battlefield,
will fall to the sugar-coated bullets
of the bourgeoisie.
You think sour dough
is the name of a nation—Florida,
which you eat with relish.
You recite for us, in Chinese,
the old, old poem
through which you teach your grandchild,
how precious
every grain of rice
spilled from her bowl:

The sun is overhead.
Everyone plows the field.
Sweat falls to the ground.
Who knows that the rice in every bowl,
every grain of it,
is precious?
Someone's labor,
harvested by hard work.

Your grandchild picks up
every grain of rice
spilled from her bowl.

I tell you of the Seri Indians
living the edge in the desert,
everyday saving their feces
so the undigested seeds
can be eaten again.
But that's filthy,
you say.

As we drive over the bridge
there are flowers, red and yellow,
tied to the railing
where the Indian girl fell to the tracks:
her blood in this sun.
Bullets coated with sugar.
You teach me Chinese silence,
beauty is a big river,
her body in the moon.
The Seri woman
picks every seed
spilled from her bowel,
someone’s precious labor.
Thousands of things,
    flowers, fish, worms, a frog,
including us,
are quiet.

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