

Excerpts from
Suite of Hands

Lydia Kwa

Le long poème de Lydia Kwa examine la trope de la main comme marque de désir et de punition. Qu'elles soient absentes ou trop présentes, les mains représentent le chagrin, la tendresse, la violence, la vulnérabilité et l'amour — tous compris dans le toucher en tant que souvenir. En passant à travers des corridors de rêves qui incluent des trains, des rues citadines et des couloirs, la rêveuse reconstruit une histoire d'amour à la fois séduisante et désastreuse. Rien ne la protège de ses propres douleurs.

the left hand wants to write a feeling
of crushed, and going against

wants to unfurl
large as the voice singing

murmurs to rhythms of the heart
hesitates at the sound of crying

*

In a dream suite, she realized she was without hands. The arms were there, familiar, easy, so that some part of her routine intelligence insisted on the truth of hands. Her eyes saw them, but they existed only as phantoms without the will to search for occupation.

While wandering through the first room, she sensed grief creep into her, one memory stretching into another. Tenderness a fleeting pulse from the centre of her chest. She glanced at a small dark table in the far corner, at its blue glass bowl choked with apricots, their skins fresh and waiting.

The sight of vulnerability.

But I didn't believe in my own touching, she whispered at the ash-grey walls, suspecting someone would hear her. Someone she might bruise with her hands, if she still had them. Someone walking around in a different dream suite, whose own mind had erased some other aspect of the body's original freedom.

Soon I'll know myself from having lost, losing until there's nothing left. She imagined each body she had stroked and rejected, until the memories ached at her wrists.

from a lake of dreams, quiet midnight
this hand is a hawk riding air

settles its wings over a memory
devil weapon of fine bones and muscle

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What she had read in a book picked off the shelf of a bookstore. The quote entered now through the deeper door of sleep, and stood solitary in the shadows of the next room.

“There are the raised arms of Desire, and there are the wide-open arms of Need.”

In the corner of dark mahogany panels, she squatted as if waiting for the train, the seventy-two hour one from Xian to Urumqi, as if it were ten years ago, that first seduction of an unknown journey. She squatted to listen better to the woman pacing the floor above her. That creaking presence, anxiety seeping through rhythm. Until the beat of that other’s life paced in her mind, heavy and measured.

It was a man who wrote that: the primacy of Desire, the spontaneous gesture of Need. *Nothing thinks as clearly as the body.*

She raised her arms up to the ceiling, trying to reach the woman who paced, who knew nothing of this quote. How could she bruise this truth past the boundaries of her guarded life?

In a different dream, there was the meaning of light and air. Laughter, long before there had been reason to forget the beauty of apricots in a blue bowl. In a different dream, the woman above her existed in the same room as her, also squatting to wait for trains.

She was still, feeling the impending journey travel towards her, from the feet up.

a memory of the father's hands
beating at the heart

the kind of crushing
they were capable of

a memory of the mother's hands
crying with failure

*

The red room. Large, and echoing, a hall. Without the pretence of paintings or photographs. Frames left hanging after theft.

She looked out of a window, and in the distance at the edge of the world, there was a vision. It travelled towards her, slow as a breath exhaled. She walked out of the room onto the dusty streets. A walled city, yellow bricks carrying sunlight in their pores, a hundred feet high.

The loneliness, not knowing how long she would need to stay within those walls. Searching for something she wasn't aware of.

I will send her a letter. Reconciling herself to this sojourn. Thirty more paces, she arrived at the edge of a courtyard, defined by a low mud wall. Warriors, all men, in sea green breastplated armour and helmets. Their arms united in sweeping the solid arcs of defence.

She recognized the moves, the muscled art. She turned to address the feminine man, *I am familiar with this, but it is the ornamentation of temples I'm more interested in.* As if to say to him, that was the meaning of her search.

She raised her head and nodded to indicate what she meant. Behind the warriors, a low temple roof. Paler than the breastplates, a faint turquoise border of ceramic reliefs, curls and waves, ancient secret.

while silent, the left hand daydreams of
magicians and fire-eaters

reaches out
still believing in flight

*

The ceiling of the dream turned from red to midnight blue, then faded to grey. She was standing in a corridor, uncertain of where she was, this slim fragment of an unknown house. No windows, yet bars of light travelled across the walls on either side, as if urging her on.

The dreamer knew she was travelling, but not how long she had been sleeping. With tiredness so complete it captured her in its languid net and delivered her back into that dull ache. *It was her mouth that bruised me*, an invisible scar lodged between her breasts while her arms had been raised over her head, crossed at the wrists with the grip of a purple scarf.

She reached out to feel the light. Tracing with her fingers, as if decoding a secret message. *Corridors always lead to rooms*. If she walked on, eventually there would be a return. To a time when desire was full with its own restraint, when her hands had chosen to submit, laughing at the semblance of passivity.

Tenderness at the heart of her torso. Nothing could protect her now, not even fear.

(The quote on page 49 is taken from Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*.)