

Yalobusha Review

Volume 17

Article 15

1-1-2012

Sweet City

Diane Lefer

Follow this and additional works at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/yr>

Recommended Citation

Lefer, Diane (2012) "Sweet City," *Yalobusha Review*. Vol. 17 , Article 15.
Available at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/yr/vol17/iss1/15>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the English at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Yalobusha Review by an authorized editor of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.

Diane Lefer

Sweet City

In Chinatown, one New Years, some people sat in glassed-in restaurants eating dumplings and Peking duck, one eye on the street. Outside, those of us without money waited in the cold for dark to fall and bring lion dancers and dragons and thundering drums. Firecrackers burst in the air. I was not the sort of New Yorker to miss a thing, so I was the one who saw her, the woman who covered her ears, then her face, who stood shaking, looking for the way out of the crowd. Explosions burst around us. I led her to a quiet street where she stood crying. “I come from Belfast,” she said.

Years pass, and now I’m a dragon dancer, too. And we’re going to have to get rid of Celeste because she hates the rich. Actually, we all do, but I think we hate Them as a class, while she hates each individual with a particularized individual resentment, which might be all right, except she lets it show.

We create visual spectacles and fantasies. Tonight, we’re doing a bar mitzvah at the Harvard Club. We are a dragon, all of us underneath the body, in our Chinese slippers and black tights. This is a dragon with many legs like a centipede—and we scamper across the floor, our right legs moving in precision, then the left. We ripple. Celeste is directly in front of me and when I see her body dip, it’s my cue to begin to go down. We create a wave, up and down, and moving forward all the time. This requires the grace that comes of muscular control but I’m not a dancer or a performer, just someone who’ll take any part-time job. I sometimes think we’re just warm bodies filling the dragon’s skin and frankly, I don’t mind being a warm body. And I don’t mind when the adolescent boys come running under the skin to join us, more interested in being part of the dragon than watching. “Get the hell out of here,” Celeste says and fouls our rhythm by shoving one boy and giving another a kick.

Now I realize the rich like to be hated a little. Our envy reassures them that they need not covet our freedom. We’re here to give pleasure—a piquant pleasure, I hope—and so we’re being paid to hate just a little. We can’t go too far. There’s a very narrow, very subtle line. Unlike Celeste, I am scrupulous. I bear in mind that the rich, who travel the city in taxicabs, are always hemmed in between buildings. They never have the thrill of emerging from underground into the open and dazzling light.

Celeste kicks. If the kids say anything to their parents, we may not work again. She's too hostile. If anyone has cause to be, I do. Earlier this evening, I was on the dance floor as Delilah, bearing on my shoulders the nine-foot-high structure of a femme fatale, surrounded by a tent of flowing synthetic fabric just sheer enough to let me see, more or less, surmounted by her huge papier-mâché head and headdress, her pouting lips painted bright red and obviously alarming to your typical 13-year-old boy, especially when he's with his matured female classmates in their busty strapless gowns. The boys took to punching Delilah in the area where they expected to find her breasts; inside the costume, what they got was my head. Reeling, I spun away to dance in the direction I hoped was nearer the adults.

I spin and dance, I can't quite see where, hoping not to bump into tables, knock over floral arrangements, give offense. In Chinatown, the dragons dance for the Year of the Horse. One year another woman cried out and trembled and told me, "I'm all right, really. It's just that Beirut is my home."

Chinese New Year comes again and again, years of the Rat and Tiger and Mouse and Pig, and women cry because they come from Baghdad and Bosnia. You are where I come from. You are the place I left.

My New York birthplace, you used to thrill me. How open you were, yet how un giving and how sealed. I would find myself saying *I want to go home* when I was already lying in my bed. And you---you were a lover turning his attentions elsewhere without ever actually telling me to go.

In California I cried for you. The Towers. Battery Park. Sweet city: impenetrable and glowing.