

one tenth of a rainbow
by the setting sun

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Sarolina Shen Chang
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1.	
On This Day	5
Beyond the Smoke and the Dust	7
After the Explosion	8
Lower Me Down	10
At the Indian Reservation	11
The Massive Retreat	12
The Glass	13
The Complacency of Life	14
The Ice Festival in Plymouth, Michigan	16
Toward the Graying Sky	17
The Avon Revisited	18
Morning Walk in Mayfair Subdivision	19
One Tenth of a Rainbow by the Setting Sun	20

2	
Were I to Lie Down	25
The Last Battle	26
Rabbit on Our Nightly Lawn	28
A Date	29
A Snowy Night	30
By This Window	31
The Little Creek	32
The Poster in the Ultrasound Examination Room	33
Raking Through the Night	34
The Winter Rain	35
Black Cat on the Second Floor Windowsill	36
The Chameleon	37
Crabbing at Midnight	38
In a Coffee Studio	39

"After the Explosion," "Lower Me Down," "The Glass,"
"One Tenth of a Rainbow by the Setting Sun," *The MacGuffin*
"Beyond the Smoke and the Dust," "The Avon Revisited,"
Rose City Poetry
"Morning Walk in Mayfair Subdivision," *The Cortland*
Review
"The Massive Retreat," *TheDetroit.com*
"The Ice Festival in Plymouth, Michigan," "The Last Battle,"
Poetry Tribe Review Anthology
"A Snowy Night," "The Chameleon," *White Crow*

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1

On this Day

September 11, 2001

1.

In the darkness that followed the chase
Of the billowing smoke and dust
I hold my breath, unable to say a prayer

It is to be the end

In the darkness I hear a voice
Feel a hand reaching out toward me
I call out to the voice
I reach out my hands

It isn't the end

2.

In the sudden darkness
There is a door
I can push to open

There is a room
I can catch my breath

There is a window
I can watch death pass by

3.

A forgotten shoe covered with dust
Still waits for the run away

The fruits lined in rows on the stand
Still waits for the escaped

4.
On the pictures that have covered
The mourning murals of the missing people
They are still smiling

To the life
Once full of hope

To the world
Now full of sorrow

5.
There are silent screams
Tearing our hearts

6.
Beyond the darkness
Beyond the despair

There is still light
There is still hope

7.
I hear the cry of a new born baby

8.
I kneel down to pray

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Beyond the Smoke and the Dust

We stop at this small town,
the gateway to a great city,
beyond the cleared smoke and settled dust,
when there's still a war going on,
with or without our attentions,
at the far corner of the world,
when colors have been applied
to the different levels of emergency
throughout the land.

Into the woods, into the fading sunlight,
Kysha is leading the way,
the leash taut with an unknown urgency.
We stumble along the narrowed paths
among the hanging branches,
come to stop at the top of a long grassy slope
overtaken by the sudden view of a lily pond.

We've arrived a little earlier than their season,
the water lilies are still waiting for
the touch of the brush on a distant canvas,
the rhyme of a certain poem on the poet's mind.

We walk to the pond,
sit down,
cross our legs,
and light a little candle in our heart,
as soft as a water lily in the twilight.

After the Explosion

42 students and teachers died at the Fang Lin Elementary School where third graders are required to assemble firecrackers.

I am coming home now, Mother,
I know it is only ten in the morning,
And we've just started the third hour.
I won't be assembling the firecrackers today,
Not at lunch break or after school.

Please don't yell at me when I get home,
Because this time
I don't have to give in my lunch money
For not finishing my daily chore.

Please don't run so fast, Father,
I won't be at school
When you get there.
I am riding this black cloud home
I promise I won't wander far and away.

I've learned a lot
Since I started third grade,
I'm now quite good at math,
Look

1 day
2 hands
10 fingers
20,000 pieces of paozhu to make
20 long firecrackers
1 week
6 school days
120,000 pieces of paozhu to make
120 long firecrackers.

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Don't run so fast, Father.
Don't cry so loud, Mother.
I am coming home.

Lower Me Down

Lower me down from this fence of prejudice,
I pleaded with all the languages I knew.
They answered with swears and curses,
the only language they could.

Lower me down and set me free,
my tortured soul, my broken bones.
They spat on my bleeding feet,
they sped away home.

Lower me down,
with an understanding.
Lower me down,
with arms outreaching.

Lower me down
on this cold cold ground.

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At the Indian Reservation

Is this the end of the Trail of Tears,
this totem pole on the deserted lot,
guarding nothing but unkept promises,
and last glimpse from a forgetful god?

Is this the end of all your trails of sorrows,
this roadside stand on the highway,
peddling your centuries-old sufferings,
beads of blood, carpets of broken hearts?

"Are you here to look for
your cousin people?"
asked one of my professors.

You're gone, footprints long been
replaced with settlers' wagon ruts,
cowboys and western movies,
casinos and slot machines.

War dances are bonused in a tour package,
war cries are souvenirized in a cassette tape,
you've long hung the pipe,
the headdress and beaten steps.

You watch the tourists swarming
into your air-conditioned hut,
you see them comparing your handicrafts
with their snobbish and bigoted cult.

One of them comes to you and asks,
"Is your restroom indoor
or just an outhouse?"

The Massive Retreat

The massive retreat was conspired
Long before the brick
First started to lose its grip

On the old monument in a city in decline
Long before the great exile
Under the banner of urbanization

Stampeded its way into another promised land
Yet they still came back
Answering the beckons of a holiday celebration

Out of the habitual sense of duty
But before the last drum beat faded around the corner
The anxious crowd started again

Another massive withdraw
Left behind scattered refuse
The future fossils of a lost civilization

Along the deserted streets

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The Glass

Born from the fire
Do you still hold
The memories of each individual grain of sand
Or the scorching passion
At the time of the union of fate

Perhaps
In many different shapes
Perhaps
In many different colors

Always icily cold
At a light touch
Understood
Only by the gradual warmth
From the fingertip

The Complacency of Life

Is it necessary to open the window
to find out
if the sun still shines
when the fog has arrived
in a heavy coat

Is it necessary to ask the clouds
to find out
if the season has changed
when the birds have answered
in their passages

Is it necessary to look for the grass
to find out
if the winter will be long
when the ducks have sign-languaged
in the pond

Is it necessary to break the silence
to find out
if the shackled has been free
when the prayers have been said
in a whisper

Is it necessary to look into your eyes
to find out
if love is still beaming out loud
when the echoes have been heard
in the heart

Is it necessary to shatter the mirror
to find out
if the image remains unbroken
when the truth has been stored
in our memory

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Is it necessary to dissect loneliness
to find out
if the shell is still hard
when the pearl has been shone
in the sun

Is it necessary to start a war
to find out
if peace has stumbled again
when the vultures are circling
in the sky

Is it necessary to pray for a meteor shower
to find out
if the universe is still growing
when the beginning has just been written
in our history

The Ice Festival in Plymouth, Michigan

The breaths of the roses
trapped inside the ice,
still speak the beauty
of love, of pride.

The whispers of the wind
caught on the banners
on top of the castle towers,
still carry the secrets
of journey, of destiny.

The goodbyes of a legend
frozen in the waving hand
of Good Ol' Charlie Brown,
still hold the memory
of humor, of anxiety.

All frozen,
in time,
in space,

the Wizard of Oz,
the fairies, the heroes,
the dolphins, the unicorns,

the steps we take,
the faces we see,
the voices we hear,

the blocks of ice,
the air of nothing,
the air of everything.

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Toward The Graying Sky

1.

Toward the graying sky,
a jogger is breaking
the frozen landscape in the park,
the ducks are looking for
the wrinkles on the motionless pond.
I stand by this little mound of snow,
left behind by the hurried shovels,
wondering if I should step into the picture also.

2.

Late afternoon,
the snow-covered pond
is an immense piece of silence,
even the shadows of the skeletal trees,
the wooden bridge and the deserted amphitheater
are shackled without a sound without a release.

3.

I might've heard the ice breaking,
chipping away in the imaginary breeze.
I might've noticed the webbed feet
inching forward, tempting a forced spring.

4.

The poems are taking off
toward the gray winter sky
and beyond.

The Avon Revisited

Where could we've been we ask ourselves
Standing on the grassy bank
Of this very Shakespearean river

We know fully well where we've been
A land full of joy and sorrow
A world of rise and fall

Yet, we seem to forget
The trees could be this green
The swans this serene

And the waters always carry this familiar tune
A crescendo here
A decrescendo there

We've walked down from the stage
Shedding another layer of our yesteryear skin
Shivering in the light breeze of a reawakening

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Morning Walk in Mayfair Subdivision

The county crew are removing the wooden planks
Around the corners of the sidewalks

They believe the north wind
Has honored their requests

They trust the early frost
Has rushed their works

There are no sketches from the hurried birds
There are no kisses from the scurried leaves

There are restrains from the detoured dogs
There are complaints from the demurred ducks

I look for the cobblestone streets
From Li Bo's Dynasty

I find this blank page
Of a new journey

One Tenth of a Rainbow by the Setting Sun

"Look at that rainbow," one of the high school girls watching the tennis match exclaimed. We all turned our heads and saw, by the setting sun, a small section, one tenth of a rainbow.

a barrette
to hold the passing by winds
the whispers from heaven

a petal
to preview the blossom of a flower
the promise of beauty

a leaf
to guide the hungry roots
the direction of sunshine

an eye
to mirror the great earth
the kaleidoscope of hope

a smile
to caress all human beings under the sky
the gentleness of gods

a boat
to fish alone the great big world
the life of happiness and sorrow

a feather
to follow the bird
searching the mythological faraway place

a bookmark
to remember a certain page
of the journey of the cloud

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a pen
to write
the most beautiful poem of life

sarolina shen chang

2

Were I to Lie Down

Were I to lie down, never again
answer the beacons from the sun,

would my hair grow wild and free,
in the winds of the untilled fields,
braiding the unyielding will?

Would my skin become pale and pasty,
in the swim of the unfulfilled dreams,
mapping the unfinished journey?

Would my heart remain young and strong,
in the spring of the unmarked year,
singing the undying song?

Were I to lie down, never again
answer the beacons from the sun.

The Last Battle

Holding rifles across our shoulders,
like carrying our own crosses,
we single-filed through the undisturbed field,
quiet in the late afternoon sun

Was it a vulture or
the enemy's cannon
perching on the distant hill,
awaiting to harvest the eternal kill?

The explosion
threw us all into the air,
then down to the earth,
we all fell.

I crawled

over the bodies that had known
only a few seasons of youth,
crying in the irony of war,
the coming of death.

I dragged

along with my last breath,
I had to get to him,
my comrade, my friend,
before it was all too late.

Numbness
set in
everything fell
in slow motions

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He lay

helplessly dead, legs blown away,
he couldn't run away from me again.
His right hand was still there
covering the left pocket on his chest.

I pushed

aside his hand,
retrieved a picture from the pocket,
that'd been so close to his heart,
so fresh in his memory.

I caught

a glimpse
of a smile,
a blurred image,
before the final darkness came.

Was it
his wife
or mine,
I could never

Tell.

Rabbit on Our Nightly Lawn

On the way
to your
rendezvous,
you suddenly
froze,
blended into
the wintry
yard, carrot-
brightened
eyes,
glaring straight
into my
headlights,
as I turned unto
my driveway.
You and I
held
our breaths,
lest a slight
stir, an
imaginative
twitch
of your whiskers,
startle
the melancholy
frost, which is
crystallizing
the dormant
grass.

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A Date

Raindrops kept falling
falling on the black umbrella,

the echoes of your heart's beating,
the unbearable yearning.

They kept singing
singing through the heavy rain,

the briny aspirations
the summer night ocean.

You came to this harbor,
mirror of your darkest desire.

You fell, unshackled, unbound,
into the water's opening arms.

Then you heard,
as you'd always heard before,

"Ma'am, why do you do this,
whenever I'm on duty, at work?"

A Snowy Night

I'll take you, my dear, to the woods,
not in a chariot, nor in a sled.
I'll take you to this remote place
so unknown to you,
in a white sedan.

I can tell how sorry you are,
but I still hold the memory the hurt,
abandoned on a street far from home,
shortly after our impromptu elope.

You will stay, my dear, by this old oak tree,
while the snow falls like tears of my yesteryears.
I'll just drive away, and leave you behind,
pretending that I've never known you in my life.
It'll look like yesterday once more,
only our roles reversed.

A leopard, by the way, was last
seen here, and hasn't been
caught.

Yet.

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By This Window

I never asked my mother
Why she washed this window
Why she stood here everyday

I didn't ask nor protest
Why I had to do the same
When she passed away

I showed him
Her picture on the wall
The window near the door

I hugged him
The prisoner of conscience
The father of long exile

The Little Creek

After the rain
the little creek has rewritten
the outlines
of its story
along the grassy banks

I stand on this tiny bridge
casting a reclaiming net
for my yesteryears

The legendary duck
has returned
swimming upstream
leaving his calling card
in the braided waters

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The Poster in the Ultrasound Examination Room

“Trust Me,” the gorilla
grinned to the little kitten
in his cage-like grip. Their
eyes were both round and bright,
convincing and believing.
I detected not a glint of fear
from the naive little one,
as I lay flat on the narrow
examination table.
The state of the art machine
started with its extended
cool-gelled fingers,
fathoming the depth of my body
with sound ultra beyond
my callused ears and layman comprehension.
It detailed my aging parts
in coded dimensions
and designs. The
busy lines kept pelting
on a nearby screen, like the
long ago rain
falling on the distant
field of my yesteryears,
interrupted only
by the various shapes of
shadows, the sure existence
of a much complex world,
only the trained
and experienced eyes
could explain.
“Trust Me,” someone said.

Raking Through the Night

In the night of the shooting
stars, I came to rake my

wintry fields, looking
for the words hibernating

in the frozen ground. In the
bright showers, rhymes

of a belated poem were
stone-washed, and lined

over the picket fence, for
the north wind to collect.

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The Winter Rain

A
sudden
winter
rain
plows
through
the
surprised
field,
sowing
the
early
seeds
all
over
my
windshield.

The Black Cat on the Second Floor Window Sill

Deep in thought, motionless
like a self-defined statue,
with complete blackness
silhouettes on a room
still sound asleep.

It turns, very
s l o w l y,
to my footsteps,

I am the fog rising
from an old poem,

the belly strikingly white,
there seems to be a line,
defining the back and front,
like a border between day and night.

Those eyes.

Moments ago,
they could've been the remotest stars,
cold and mysterious
throughout time.

Now, in the morning light,
They've become gentle and soft,
as if they've been this way all the time.

I am the fog leaving
for another poem.

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The Chameleon

They can travel far and long
without carrying a suitcase.
The whole world is their complete wardrobe:
the bronze of the branches,
the green of the leaves,
the red of the flowers,
the blue of the skies,
the emerald of the hills.

They can be the perfect spies,
two bulging eyes,
each looking into different directions
up or down,
at the same time,
for the possible preys
or suspects.

Their tongues are stretchy and sticky,
they can unroll and extend
into great length,
snatching up the surprised prize from afar
in a split of a second,
like a retrievable missile
shooting from a well hidden silo.

Crabbing at Midnight

The pier has disappeared into
the great silence that embraces
the waters and the skies

We lower the cage
baited with two drumsticks
to the sleepless bottom of the sea

Who's fishing at the Great River high above
who's to read the fortunes
of the ancient stars

The night breeze must've brought along
the secret gossips among
the fish, the shrimps, and the crabs

That this midnight rendezvous
shall be another
beautiful mistake

We still wait
patiently for an answer
on this long quiet pier

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In a Coffee Studio

In a coffee studio,
the dark clothed poet leaned against the door,
like the shadow of a long ago memory.
His fingers grabbing the poem,
chiseled the air, the mused marbles.
He swayed a little, because the wind
or the shivering of an uncollected soul.
One of his shoelaces was loose,
trailing innocently on the floor,
like the forgotten rhyme of his words.

The door chimes ushered in,
strangers of an uneventful evening.
The steamer heated up mugful of aroma,
bearing different maturity seasons.
The floor squeaked, the intentional
announcement of night's arrival.

The poetess' hair was neatly held
by a bluish barrette.
She touched gently the memory
of a lost brother, her voice so steady.
Her eyes became misty yet,
when she blew at the foamy cappuccino.

The guitar poet pecked away,
notes of his gridiron mind.
His yowling ensemble,
awoke the wandering soul
from his deep slumber.

The night, saturating
in aromatic melody,
poemed on,

punctuated only by
my early departure.

The road sign will shine,
beacon for an encore,
another time.

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