

## CONTRASTS

by Donna Seto

The chipped wooden cane of my century-old grandmother  
beats haphazardly against the damp asphalt  
drumming to a history of broken dreams  
fossilized by grey-black gum  
chewed by absent ancestors.

A mustached man on East Pender,  
a has-been accountant with a southern Chinese accent  
my grandmother once mistook as her late husband,  
hollers across the crowd of Sunday shoppers  
    that his gai lan is fresher, greener,  
        and crisper than his competitor on Keefer.

His calculated eyes full of adulterous ambitions,  
    the slight upturn of his lips resembling a smile  
        that women once swooned over during better times.

On sale, poh-poh, the man who is not my grandfather says.  
    Bargain –  
    Ninety-nine cents a pound.  
        The man's village accent echoes down the paint-splattered street,  
        sending pigeons flocking from frayed electric lines.

Hushed chatter  
of forgotten rice patties and fermented fish  
sundried on an old laundry line  
above a charcoal fire  
in a blackened hut  
no different from the one  
    my grandmother once called her home.

The tattered shoes on my grandmother's unbound feet shuffles  
alongside graffitied walls and broken windows.  
Post-apocalyptic scenes of a war-torn past made present  
except this is not a war,  
    at least not the kind with guns and grenades.

Hungry tastebuds dance to the rhythm of fat  
glistening on golden roast ducks  
strung out on silver hooks in a butcher shop window on Gore,  
    laminated with grease as thick as the layers of paint  
        on its exterior.

The city donated paint to fix this graffiti problem, the butcher tells my grandmother,  
breathing out a drawn-out sigh while waving his clever,  
We suffer there, we suffer here.

Who did I wrong in my past life?

My grandmother's cataract eyes squint  
at the shadows that flicker to the glow  
of a red paper lantern,  
while pale-skinned tourists watch the fat drip  
from carcasses  
like raindrops cascading to the ground  
from rooftops.

A hipster waltzes into the butcher shop,  
in designer jeans he claims are from Value Village,  
but he purchased on a whim from Nordstrom.  
Belly full of foie gras served on heirloom sourdough,  
he washes down with an  
\$7 oat milk latte,  
while k-pop blasts from his thousand-dollar earbuds  
as he snaps a photo  
of my century-old grandmother.

Authentic china-doll poh-poh, the hipster says  
as he shares the filtered snapshot with the world.